

# JEEVADHARA

*A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION*

ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE 1990'S

ENCOUNTER OF RELIGIONS

SOME CONCERNS AS WE FACE 1991'S

M. Sathyanadan

EMERGING SENSE OF HOPE IN THE CHURCHES

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RELIGION AND SOCIO-CULTURAL PROBLEMS

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Edna Wilson

A RELIGIOUS TO RELIGIOUS

John Kattar

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**JEEVADHARA**

# **The Human Problem**

**ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE 1990'S**

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# The Twentieth Year

## Prospect and Retrospect

1990 is the twentieth year of our publication of *Jeevadhara*\*. Twenty years was no easy going for a journal published separately in English and the vernacular without any break, considering its plight of being, not rarely, at odds with the establishment, without any institutional aid and with hardly any infrastructure for any kind of propaganda. We have had to be satisfied with the 'apostolate of the rose', its beauty and fragrance being the sole attraction for people to take it. But our progress has not been all roses. A few recent issues failed to come up to the standard we had set. No failure, however, goes without being put to good use as stepping-stones to success.

*Jeevadhara* is the outcome of the concerted effort of Indian theologians. Its editorial team had been for many years the nucleus of the Indian Theological Association from its birth in 1976. The first members of the team are: Samuel Rayan, John B. Chethimattam, Sebastian Kappen, K. Luke, George Puthumana and others. Chethimattam and Rayan have been all through behind every move for the all-around growth of the journal. Kappen nurtured it with his substantial contributions. Luke had been from the beginning the able editor of its Bible issue for many years. The title of the journal, finally approved by the registering authority, was that suggested by Puthumana.

Today we have already more than forty theologians on the editorial board. We should like to co-opt more and more of them. Since a primary concern of *Jeevadhara* is

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\*A Malayalam word derived from Sanskrit, meaning "Life-current" and pronounced "d3i: vadha:ra".

to help in evolving an Indian theology, it has to invite and urge Indian theologians to enter every field of theological thinking, research, and writing.

As Christians we love the Church, but the truth more. It was our avowed policy to "proclaim the truth even if it is unpleasant, without fear or flattery, without being deterred by frowns or by hindrance from any quarter whatsoever, from any individual or the establishment". Contributors, being learned and responsible, are always free to express their views. That the success of this policy has been widely recognised is borne out by statements recently made by some of our theologians: *Jeevadhara* "is perhaps the only theological Journal in India where we can express our reflections freely" (Sebastian Painadath). Another of our noted theologians, who has just completed a long survey of the development of Indian theology, says: "I have been struck by the enormous contributions *Jeevadhara* has made to theological thinking in India" (Felix Wilfred).

This is no incentive to rest on our laurels, but to forge ahead. We have a long way to go — not always a trodden one. New problems and new challenges await us. Traditions and dogmas have to be rethought, Scriptures have to be re-interpreted and re-lived in the present historical moment and cultural context. This will be one of the main concerns of *Jeevadhara* for which we solicit the co-operation and encouragement of all men and women of goodwill.

General Editor



## Editorial

Human history presents both continuity and surprises. But as we forge ahead into the future, the element of surprise, the unpredictable and the fortuitous, seems to dominate over that of continuity. To put it in another way, we may ask: Could the generation which lived at the end of the last century have foreseen the developments we have experienced in the last few decades? Granting that they did to some degree, it is going to be even more difficult for us today to envision the shape of the new century before us. The difference between what we are able reasonably to foresee, imagine and project, and what will actually come to pass, is going to be something unprecedented.

That makes any prognostics about the new century extremely difficult. These pages are not meant as an exercise in futurology or prophecy. They offer a few reflections about the future basing on indications and trends of the present. That is one of the ways we can meaningfully talk of the future.

The article of M. Amaladoss deals with religions as they face the future of humankind together. Secularism and fundamentalism are two crucial issues. Their role has to be understood against the background of communalism, the child of two adolescent parents — immature religion and volatile politics. Hopefully the coming decade will bring greater clarity of vision on these issues which heavily impinge upon the poor and the most lowly in our society. Rajni Kothari, a leading political scientist and member of the Planning Commission in his interview granted to Pooranam Demel for publication in *Jeevadhara*, admits that religion does play a role in fashioning the future; its place, however, cannot and should not be exaggerated. He calls for a transition from religion to religiosity. This is

necessary to be able to meet the many socio-political challenges facing the humankind.

Ecumenical understanding and co-operation among the Christian Churches on various common human concerns, should open up the Christian communities to forge new relationships with neighbours of other faiths. The article of Kuncheria Pathil deals with the relationship among the Christian Churches in the years ahead. J. Kottukapally, on his part, reflects on the inter-ideological relationship and the interaction between ideologies and religions as they move towards a common goal of justice and liberation for the whole of humankind.

Grass-root movements for the liberation of the oppressed have been active in various parts of India during the past two decades. They have come under virulent critique both from the left and the right — for varying reasons, of course. What is going to be the future of grass-root activism? Mary Pillai studies this question with special focus on the liberation of women. Felix Wilfred points to the direction of global and local developments at the turn of the century by reflecting on the emerging socio-cultural trends and processes.

These reflections, it is hoped, will help the readers to peep through the window overlooking the world of the future and have a glimpse of the mountains, valleys and rivers, amidst the fog of uncertainty that envelops it.

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Felix Wilfred



# Encounter of Religions

## Some concerns as we face the 1990's

Pluralism is always a problem. This is true of religions and economic systems and political ideologies and social structures. Where there is no open conflict of one seeking to dominate or suppress the others, there is a search to reduce pluralism to a unity. This search for unity can take various forms. If we take the field of religion, as an example, one way is to affirm one's own legitimacy and deny any legitimacy to others, even if those who claim it may be a minority and may face persecution. Another way is to order everything in a hierarchy, often placing oneself at the top. For instance Christianity thinks of itself as the latest and most perfect covenant coming after the cosmic and judaic covenants. A minor variation in the hierarchical system is compartmentalization, where each unit is assigned a special place and does not interfere with the others. The caste system is an example in the social sphere. Many sects in Hinduism tend to become castes. Still another solution is to acknowledge pluralism at a phenomenal level, but to affirm a basic unity that is either transcendental (that is, in the scheme of things) or eschatological (that is, a project for the future). Certain inclusivistic approaches in the Christian theology of religions and modern Advaitic approaches to other religions tend to be transcendental. In this spectrum, where can we place the contemporary encounter between religions? Is there an ideal situation towards which we should move? What are the prospects in the concrete, historical situation?

In the following pages I would like to focus my attention on the Indian situation. The world situation is so mobile and complex that one might tend to lose oneself in generalities.

On the other hand, what is true of India can be true of most other societies, so that we can really rise from the particular to the general in our reflection and prospecting. One could even say that India offers an ideal model to reflect on such a problem, not only because of the presence of all the great religions as well as smaller ones, but also because of its efforts to build a secular society, according to a democratic Constitution, that has a positive attitude to the religions. Our starting point then is that pluralism of religions in India is a fact. How can we come to terms with it in a creative way so that it helps rather than hinders India's effort to build a better future for all its peoples. This should be an important concern of dialogue in the 1990's.

### **A new situation: emergence of democratic states**

I think that we are facing a new historical situation. In India people of different religious beliefs have always been living together, though in a rigidly structured and compartmentalized society. What is new is the effort made to integrate these groups into one democratic nation. In order to understand this situation well it will be helpful to explore a wider background.

Religion and culture are linked closely together. Religion is the deepest element in culture, giving it its meaning system in the context of ultimate perspectives. In its turn, culture gives a socio-historical presence to religious belief and commitment. In simpler human communities with cosmic religions there is no separation between religion and culture. Only some of the great religions claim to free themselves of cultural limits and through missionary movements make themselves present in various cultural contexts. But the tendency has always been for any given human group to find a basis for its identity in some fundamental convictions that are derived from a particular religion. In monarchic societies this is indicated by the principle: *cujus regio, eius religio* (that is, the people follow the religious beliefs of the king). The missionaries often made use of this principle by directing their proclamation to the political leaders of a community. This is also why many new religions were persecuted as threats to the State.

The Islamic countries, Hindu, Nepal and Buddhist Tibet are obvious contemporary examples. But the principle is more wide-spread than we might imagine. England has an established Church; and Italy has special links to the Catholic Church. Hindu and Muslim minorities can bear witness to the Christian – or “post-Christian” – character of the countries in Europe. Even in the United States of America, a Hindu has little chance of being elected president. In all these countries, of course, believers in other religions are tolerated. But the basic inspiration of the culture remains Christian.

The situation, however, is changing because of developments both in reality and in ideology. In the past, people belonging to a different religion may have been mostly temporary migrants for commercial or other purposes and did not pose a problem to social cohesion. But owing to missionary movements and migrations followers of other religions form sizable minorities among the residents of many countries today. For example, there is a greater percentage of Muslims in France, Belgium and Germany than there are Christians in many countries of Asia. In most countries of Africa, Christians and Muslims form large groups of the population. Therefore religious pluralism has become a fact of life that cannot be ignored. It has always been so in India and has remained so even after the partition of the subcontinent along religious lines. The pluralism is even more pronounced than elsewhere because of the number of religious groups: besides Hinduism and Islam, also Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism, not to speak of the various tribal religious groups.

This fact of pluralism becomes a problem everywhere today because of the democratic ideology. Democracy supports freedom, equality and fraternity of the citizens. But it does so not in terms of their race or religion. It is an individual person that possesses democratic rights. A person is equal to another simply because of his basic humanity<sup>1</sup>. His religious, racial or caste identity becomes very secondary in relation to his fundamental rights and freedoms. This does not mean that discriminations based on race or religion or caste disappear automatically. But it does mean that such discrimination, however actual, is illegal and against the ideology on which the national community is founded. This implies that



the meaning system that provides a unifying basis for the national community is no longer that of a particular religion, whatever may have been the process of its historical origins. The ideology on which the national community is based claims to be independent of any religious affiliation. This ideology would be true of most modern democratic Constitutions. This means that religion in such societies is neither a cohesive nor a divisive factor by itself. It can help and support the unity. It should not undermine it. This is the ideology. But the reality may not necessarily correspond to it. Just as caste is as strong today in India as before the democratic Constitution and just as race is as important a divisive factor in the United States of America today as before its foundation as a modern democratic state, religion too continues to be a divisive factor in multi-religious societies. That is why pluralism of religion is not only a fact but a problem. Ideologically it should not be a problem; but as a matter of fact it is. This tension between fact and ideology provides an incentive to reform or transform the facts in order to conform to the ideology. This is probably the most important element of the new situation: that is, the emergence of human communities, whose ideology of unity does not depend for its basic meaning upon a particular religion. Thus there is a differentiation between religion and the political structure.

### **Secularization and social Institutions**

This differentiation is further strengthened by the process that is characteristic of the phenomenon of secularization. One of the results of the secularization of society is precisely the emergence into at least a relative autonomy of the various institutions that constitute society<sup>2</sup>. Culture, Economics, Politics, Science etc. acquire an autonomy as meaning systems with a certain legitimacy at their own level. Religion is still the provider of meaning from an ultimate perspective. But it no longer provides an over-arching, global meaning system as it did before the process of secularization. There is always the danger that the non-religious meaning systems seek to absolutize their autonomy. Apart from this danger, the differentiation, for example, between culture and religion makes it possible that different cultural systems draw inspiration from the same religious system, just as a given cultural system

may find inspiration from various religions. Thus differentiation makes possible a kind of pluralism. The fact of religiously pluralistic societies acquire a legitimacy in terms of a democratic ideology, with secularization and the consequent differentiation between social institutions providing the condition of possibility for such pluralism. Democratic ideology and secularization do not necessarily offer a positive role to religious pluralism in the building up of the national community. But neither do they prevent it.

### **The need for religion**

I had remarked above that the non-religious socio-cultural institutions may tend to make their autonomy absolute. Though secularization may not make people less religious, it does tend to make religion a private affair. If religion becomes such for individuals or groups, then again the pluralism of religions is not a problem. But it was Gandhi who remarked that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means<sup>2</sup>. Religion, it is true, has to do with ultimate perspectives, but not only in themselves in the abstract, but in so far as they have an impact on life here and now. Religion is not merely a creed; it gives rise to a body of moral principles of behaviour. This morality is not merely for the individual, but for the community. Correspondingly, other social systems may have a certain autonomy in themselves. But their autonomy is not absolute. They are not adequately meaningful in themselves. Left to themselves, economy will be governed by the profit motive, politics will be guided by the realities of power, science will pursue knowledge for its own sake without worrying about its social consequences and technology will only worry about efficiency. They will forget that they are at the service of the human community. It is the task of religion to keep this perspective alive in terms of ultimacy and transcendence and keep challenging the limited autonomies of the other social institutions, just as the other institutions will keep challenging religion so that it does not become alienating and other-worldly.

### **Conditions of pluralism**

It is only when religion is given its proper role in human community that pluralism of religions becomes a problem. Re-

ligions tend to be absolute in their affirmations and do not easily tolerate other absolutes. Co-existence of religions, not merely as private belief systems, but as having a public role in society, becomes possible only on the following conditions: (i) every religion, that is a community of believers, is able to make space for other believers, that is other religions, not merely in the sense of their being tolerated as second class citizens, but accepted as full and equal participants; (ii) every religion is able to distinguish between its faith convictions and the moral consequences; (iii) a certain consensus regarding moral imperatives for personal and social behaviour can be arrived at by people who believe differently. When these conditions are present one could go one step further and evoke the possibility that each religion is open to be challenged on what it sees as the inevitability of the process through which the moral consequences flow from faith convictions. Such openness would make the consensus not merely a minimum common denominator, but something dynamic, ongoing, creative and mutually enriching. In a multi-religious community, therefore, every religious group is rooted in its own faith; it accepts other such groups as legitimate; it is open to dialogue with them in view of a common commitment to build up the community.

To clarify further the ideal that I am proposing here I would like to underline three points that are implicit in the foregoing vision. My focus has been not on religions, but on believers. Religions do not encounter each other in the abstract. Believers in different faiths live together and encounter each other. I am not comparing one religion to another as belief systems or moral codes or world views. The legitimacy that I ask to be accorded is not primarily to another religion, but to another believer. The root of religious freedom is the dignity and conscience of the human person. Therefore what is fundamental is the respect that we should have for the other as a person and to his convictions, whether religious or other. I can dialogue with or seek to persuade, but not dominate, much less suppress the other person. This personal and human perspective is that of the modern democratic Constitutions. It is also the perspective of the Second Vatican Council, in its Decree on Religious Freedom, and later documents of the Church in the social field<sup>4</sup>.



The second point I would like to underline is the fact that the Indian people have given to themselves a Constitution, based on the fundamental rights and liberties of the human person, and committed to a national community guaranteeing freedom, equality, fraternity and justice to all its citizens<sup>5</sup>. Therefore the religions in India do not have an option in the matter, but are faced with the challenge of collaborating in the building up of the national community, so that they can be positive and constructive and not divisive forces.

The third point that I would like to highlight is that I am not interested in inter-religious encounter for its own sake. It is true that at a certain level such encounters can dispel prejudices, promote mutual understanding, discover common ground, provide mutual enrichment etc. Such inter-religious dialogue is necessary and useful. But the real challenge of inter-religious encounter today is not simply at the religious level, but what they can do together to promote a community of fellowship, justice and peace. Often one speaks of the pursuit of Truth or of the experience of God as if God could be experienced independently of the world and of the other. Such a perspective is alienating. Religions do not exist for their own sake. Their purpose is to facilitate a fuller human – and therefore divine – life for the people. Their purpose is to make life meaningful and even revelations are oriented to that. Therefore when religions meet each other and do not talk about life in the world they are being untrue to their own identity. Only when religions stop being narcissistic and are concerned with people will they see religious pluralism as a challenge. It is in their common commitment to a fuller life for the whole of humanity that religions would discover their own community and complementarity.

In our own Christian religious tradition, the theology of religions seeks to make space in the context of our own faith for other religions<sup>6</sup>. The Second Vatican Council spoke of God being the common origin and end of all peoples<sup>7</sup>. The Asian Bishops spoke of God manifesting Himself also in other religions<sup>8</sup>. Coming together with leaders of other religions to pray for peace in Assisi in 1986, Pope John Paul recognized the legitimacy of other religions and pointed out that what unites us is more profound and primary than what divides

us<sup>9</sup>. The need and the possibility of collaboration of all believers in the promotion and defence of common human and spiritual values have been repeatedly affirmed in recent Church documents<sup>10</sup>. Theologians may continue to discuss the implications of this openness to other religions for our traditional views regarding revelation, sharing worship and the mediation of Jesus Christ. In a sense these are in-house discussions and we may or may not agree on the solutions suggested by scholars. But this discussion need not and should not stop us from inter-religious encounter as a means of building up a new world.

### **Obstacles to dialogue**

It is in the context of this vision of a multi-religious community, that is not only a hope for the future, but a concrete challenge thrown to us by our Constitution, that we have to look at the obstacles that are preventing such a fruitful encounter today.

I would like to evoke here four obstacles: prejudice, secularism, fundamentalism and communalism. Prejudice has its roots often in ignorance. Especially in India, because of the caste system, we are accustomed to live in a society that is highly compartmentalized. This means that as a religious community we are living in a world of our own. We are ignorant of the beliefs and practices of other peoples. The gap left by ignorance is filled by prejudice. This may be transmitted from generation to generation. The other is simply an outsider. He does not exist as some one to relate to. One is ready to believe every rumour. Even hatred is a relationship. But ignorance is simply the absence of relationship. Sometimes what is called tolerance may take this form. The other is not respected, much less accepted. There is no sense of community. Religious diversity is recognized, but it does not become a problem. I am afraid that the tolerance, on which the Indians pride themselves, is not positive, but is of such negative kind.

Secularism is not widespread in India. But one may see it among the more educated. Religion is privatized. Religious beliefs and practices are one's private affair. They have no place in public life. Provided one is faithful to the law of the land, one is to be left alone to hold whatever beliefs one wishes. The danger here is that bereft of its religious base, moral prin-

ciples in public life fall a prey to self-interest, efficiency, success, profit motive etc.

Fundamentalism is a narrow affirmation of the truth of one's own beliefs. The others may not be considered insincere, but deluded. Error has no rights, of course. While we should tolerate people who are in error, out of a basic humanity, we need not take them seriously. Since polity and public life are to be built on truth, people who believe differently are reduced to second class status. No distinction is made between religion and morality, nor between what is moral and what is legal. A mild form of fundamentalism sees in religion the cementing force between people and tries to promote a state religion. This tendency is quite wide-spread in the world even today<sup>11</sup>. We have Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu and Christian States: sometimes in principle, often in practice. Even in India, in spite of its Constitution, Hinduism does dominate public life, though the religious minorities are protected by the Constitution and the Courts. Most religions have smaller groups of active fundamentalists: the RSS in India, the Muslim Brotherhood in some Islamic countries, the Moral Majority in the U. S. A., 'Communism and Liberation' in Italy. They confuse too quickly religion and society, faith and politics. The fundamentalists have no use for inter-religious encounter. The other believers are reduced, in practice, if not in principle, to second-class status.

Another aspect of fundamentalism is proselytism. Witnessing to one's own faith, even with the intention of calling the other to conversion, if it is respectful of the other and his convictions is always done in dialogue. But proselytism is aggressive and dominating. Even if only a small group in a religious community, for instance some evangelical groups among Christians, is engaged in proselytism, it throws suspicion on the whole community and creative and positive encounter between religions becomes difficult.

A milder form of fundamentalism may show itself in a self-sufficient attitude that has eyes only for what is lacking in others. However perfect may be the object of our faith, our own understanding, expression and practice of it is culturally and historically conditioned and limited. An awareness



of such limitations would keep us more open to receive as much as to give in the process of encounter. For instance, the eastern religions have a more cosmic, holistic and harmonious approach to reality compared to the anthropocentric, abstract and dichotomous approach characteristic of the Christian tradition influenced by Greco-Roman culture<sup>12</sup>. From this point of view cultures and religions may be seen as complementary and dialogue as an element of growth. A similar difficulty arises when religions do not realize that their language is evidently symbolic. Ongoing interpretation to make the original memory relevant to contemporary reality is necessary to make religion historically pertinent. A religion that cannot do this is not only incapable of dialogue, but is also unable to provide a prophetic challenge to society.

While fundamentalism is a religious attitude, communalism is a political one. Communalism believes that the people who share the same religious beliefs also share the same economic and political interests. Hence it seeks to turn the religious community into a political power-block. While communalism may be based also on other factors like caste, race, language etc., religious communalism seems to be the most dangerous, because it uses all the emotional power of faith, which has an absolute character, to support its crusade for political control. The other believers are not merely second class citizens: they are enemies. There is not only no respect and no acceptance; there is a nursing of hatred and mistrust. One cannot any longer speak of a national community. Communalism reduces religion to its lowest level, by making it a political tool. Religion then loses its prophetic role and legitimates the pursuit of political power.

### **Means of promoting inter-religious encounter**

What are the ways of promoting a profitable inter-religious encounter? My intention here is not to give a list of activities that one could engage in, but rather indicate areas to which one must pay attention.

First of all, we must strive to promote an experiential awareness of one's own religious identity. Often identity is not affirmed in positive terms of what one is and has, but in terms of what some one else is not having—that is, identity

is determined by difference. It would be better if we can be positive about ourselves, be aware of our strengths as well as our limitations, be proud of what we have and be articulate about what we can contribute to the enrichment of others, leaving others to witness to their own identity, without presuming to tell them what they have or do not have. An affirmation of identity that does not depend on the principle of contradiction has better chances of discovering community-in-difference and of doing away with prejudices.

Secondly we must be really committed to a national human community, based on the freedom and dignity of the human person and promoting equality, fellowship and justice for all. We must see the role of religions as prophetic, not divisive, contributing, in dialogue with each other, a common human, moral and spiritual foundation to public life. In doing so religions are not playing politics, but doing precisely what they should do as religions in human society. All citizens must be formed to such a democratic world view through precept and practice. Religions must be able to distinguish between what can be demanded of all, even legally, even in terms of a moral consensus, and what each one of them has a right to demand from its own adherents in terms of its beliefs. Each religion has certainly the democratic right to seek to enlarge the area of consensus through dialogue and persuasion, but not to impose it through legislation<sup>13</sup>. In India we are still moving towards a common civil code based on fundamental rights and freedoms. Though the Courts have consistently supported such a move, religions and interested politicians have not always been enlightened and constructive in their policies and behaviour<sup>14</sup>.

Thirdly, an inter-religious community is built up by living and acting as one, not just by talking. Theological discussions and sharing of spiritual experiences have a role, but only as elements of common projects to promote freedom, fellowship, equality and justice. One could think of Basic Human Communities that engage themselves in such a process.

### Conclusion

One can see that such an inter-religious encounter is not primarily of the religious leaders and experts, but of the

people who live and work and struggle in the world. It must primarily be a dialogue of life. Sometimes one speaks of various levels of dialogue starting with the dialogue of life and ending with that of spiritual experiences. I think that the order should be reversed. Or rather one could say that it must be circular: from dialogue of life to that of spiritual experiences, back to dialogue of life to be tested in the crucible of praxis. The criterion of authentic religion and spirituality lies in their commitment to the promotion of a more authentic and fuller human life, because "the glory of God is the living human person".

M. Amaladoss

### Footnotes

- 1 Andre Beteille, *The Idea of Natural Inequality and Other Essays* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 88-89.
- 2 Richard K. Fenn, *Toward a Theory of Secularization* (Society for the Study of Religion, 1978); Peter Glassner, *The Sociology of Secularization* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); Philip E. Hammond (ed), *The Sacred in a Secular Age* (Berkley, University of California, 1985); David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1978)
- 3 M. K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad, Navjivan, 1945), p.615.
- 4 E. g. the latest, John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.
- 5 *The Constitution of India*, Preamble.
- 6 M. Amaladoss, "Theological Basis for Religious Pluralism", in S. Arulsamy, (ed), *Communalism in India* (Bangalore, Claretian, 1988; *Theses on Inter-religious Dialogue* (FABC Paper 48); *Living and Working Together with Sisters and Brothers of Other Faiths* (FABC Papers 49). 7. *Nostra aetate*, 1.
- 8 FABC, "Evangelization in Modern day Asia", 14-15, in *For All the Peoples of Asia* (Manila, 1984).
- 9 Secretariat pro Non-Christianis, *Bulletin* 64 (1987), pp. 56-57.
- 10 John Paul II, Speech in Madras, in *Origins* 15,36 (Feb. 20, 1986), p. 598; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 47.
- 11 Peter H. Merkl and Ninian Smart (eds), *Religion and Politics in the Modern World* (New York, New York University Press, 1985)
- 12 Felix Wilfred, "Dialogue Gasping for Breath? Towards New Frontiers in Inter-religious Dialogue" in *FABC Papers* 49, pp. 32-52.
- 13 J. C. Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1960).
- 14 The case of Shaira Banu a couple of years ago is a good example. The Supreme Court upheld her human right, though the Politicians were quick to neutralize the Court.



## Emerging Signs of Hope in the Churches

Are there not more signs of despair or hopelessness than of hope in the Churches today during this post-Vatican II period? People like Archbishop Lefevre would answer this question strongly in the affirmative. They would complain that the Church today is ruled by confusion and chaos at all levels: doctrinal, liturgical, disciplinary and administrative. For them it would be better that the Church goes back to the Council of Trent and to the medieval Christendom for its orthodoxy, stability and order.

On the opposite pole, we have strong and powerful voice of theological critics like Hans Küng who would complain that the post-Vatican II leadership in the Catholic Church has betrayed the Council and relinquished the hope given by it. In spite of the impulse given by the Council for a new ecclesiology based on the People of God concept and the doctrine of Collegiality, no significant change was effected in the institutional and personal power structure of the government of the Catholic Church. According to these critics the Church today has relapsed into the preconciliar absolutism, juridicism and centralism, according to the old saying, "Councils come to an end, Popes pass away, but the Roman Curia goes on"<sup>1</sup>.

The hopelessness expressed by the first group will be quickly dismissed as the views and complaints of a too conservative group in the Church, whereas the criticism of the second group might be seen as the reaction of the radicals. But one cannot definitely ignore certain obvious signs of hopelessness in the Church today. With Pope John XXIII and Vatican II the Catholic Church made a serious effort to read the signs of the times and to make the Church up-to-date

and more open to the other Churches, other religions and other realities in the world. But when faced with the implementation of the changes proposed by the Council and its possible consequences, the post-Vatican II leadership in the Catholic Church seemed to hesitate and all movements for change apparently came to a standstill or stalemate. The role of the entire people of God in the life of the Church, in its mission, ministry and decision-making bodies was not juridically and theologically spelt out. The collegiality of the Bishops was not juridically implemented, and the Church seems to function once again in a monarchical, pyramidal and centralized fashion. The aspirations, wishes and choices of the local Churches in matters of liturgical inculturation and episcopal nominations were, in some cases, simply ignored by the Vatican authorities. Freedom in theologizing was often denied by silencing more and more theologians. The spontaneous national, and regional episcopal conferences are more often looked upon as a threat to the central authority of the Churches. The dialogue with the other Churches has apparently suffered a serious set back in recent times because of the unwillingness or lack of readiness of many Churches to move forward. Yes, sloth, apathy and lethargy in the Churches are the signs of hopelessness.

But in spite of the dark clouds looming large on the horizon of the Churches, a Christian has to be basically an optimist. The Church is not ultimately something merely human, but divine, constituted, maintained and guided by God, by the work of the Holy Spirit and by its Risen Lord Jesus Christ. It has received the promises and hope from God though in fragile earthen vessels. Whatever may be the historical short-comings and failures of the Church, ultimately it will triumph in the power of the Spirit promised to it. Christian optimism is also based on the faith in the ultimate goodness of God's creation, especially that of human nature. Whatever be the evils committed and perpetuated by human beings, in the long run, I believe, the goodness of human nature will prevail and our human history as well as the whole creation will emerge victorious reaching its final destiny. This basic Christian optimism inspires us to discern or identify certain concrete signs of hope

in the Churches today, and to hope not only for the remote future but also for the next decade and for the third millennium.

### **Emerging new models of Churches**

Look at a fresh sign of hope in the Church: "... a multi-purpose hall in Sao Miguel, a suburb of that sprawling city (Sao Paulo Brasil) of over twelve million people. Gathered here for their Sunday celebration are some sixty people: men, women and children. The fifteen young people standing at the two heads of the table are clearly in charge... They face the people who are seated in a semi-circle. One of them, a woman, is the leader of this morning's celebration, a sort of first among equals. The people stand as she reads the gospel... The reading is followed by a play, enacted by the young people. They seem to be asking questions on the gospel passage... answering it through enacted testimonies. The people join in ... Individual members pray, but not for personal needs. They pray for... concerns which are common to the community. Now the young people go in solemn procession to the small room where the blessed sacrament is preserved... They return to the table... more prayers. Then the kiss of peace, during which is much movement in the hall... It is a movement of joyful acceptance of one another, a true celebration of community... People go up to the table. It is time for communion. There are songs, quite a number of them. They are mostly their own... The leader gives the blessing... The chairs are rearranged to form a full circle, and discussion starts on the work of the week and the issues of the community... They celebrate Christ and community, affirming their faith and rejoicing in their togetherness in Christ"<sup>2</sup>.

This new phenomenon or movement is known as the emergence of "Basic Christian Communities". It is a new ecclesial model, a model of the "People's Church", challenging in a way the traditional institutional and hierarchical models. It is a new style of Christian living, a new mode of building up community in the context of poverty, oppression and injustice, especially in the Latin American context. There are more than 1,50,000 such communities covering all over the South American continent. They are now spreading all over the world, especially in Asia and Africa which have a context similar to South



America. In Kerala, practically all the parishes are divided into a number of wards or smaller groups consisting of 15-20 families of a small locality and they meet regularly for praying, for studying the Bible and for other parish activities. It is reported that Bombay Archdiocese has more than 400 Basic Communities and other dioceses like Pune, Goa, Mangalore, Baroda, Mysore etc., follow suit.

But it must be pointed out that groups gathered just for prayer and Latin American BCC's are not exactly identical, for the latter is characterized by its socio-political involvement and commitment. The BCC's are committed to transform the present evil structures of the society. Common prayer and Bible studies lead them to this task. This might be one of the major differences between BCC's and the charismatic prayer groups here which to a great extent evade the socio-political questions by taking refuge in the solace and tranquillity of prayer.

These new communities are the historical Churches' "becoming" as real and authentic Churches, i.e., real communities of people with mutual sharing of fellowship. Here ministry becomes primarily the ministry of every Christian. Here the "Word of God" becomes once again powerful and alive in the life of the people, and the whole community becomes really "prophetic". A new theology, people's theology, in a new language, style and idiom is being born in this movement. The hopes contained in these new forms and types of Christian communities need to be nurtured.

### **Awakening of the laity**

The emergence of the Basic Christian Communities, as described above, is the manifestation of a new awakening of the laity. In the original vision, the Church was a "community" of believers in Christ, a community of brothers and sisters, where everybody enjoyed perfect equality and freedom. There were no "superiors" or "inferiors", no distinction or division between those who ruled and those who were ruled. Of course, each one had a different function and charism in the community. Charisms in the community and for the community were not the monopoly of any one individual or any one group. The authority in the Church was entrusted to the whole community<sup>3</sup>, though the apostles and their successors had a specific role in

the community. Early Christian Communities did not have "priests" as such in the strict sense of "mediators between God and Man", for they were all priests or "a kingdom of priests" that they could themselves address God as "Abba" and perform thus the priestly function<sup>4</sup>. But as the Church became more and more institutional, "sacerdotalism" and "clericalism" — the emergence of a "priestly class" separated from the People who were dominated and dictated to by the former — developed and prevailed in the Church. The leaders of the community whose role was *diakonia*, "to serve and not to be served" and "to be the slave of all"<sup>5</sup>, gradually turned to be masters lords and hierarchy with "jurisdiction" in an imperial and political fashion. The Church and its "mission" became exclusively the task of bishops and priests and the laity was pushed to the bottom of the ecclesial pyramid, just to receive, obey and pay.

Although Vatican II reasserted the dignity and equality of the entire people of God elaborating on their priestly, prophetic and pastoral roles, the vast majority of the laity are still in deep slumber, and the hierarchy is very careful not to awaken them. But the signs of an awakening are in the offing. The Roman Synod of Bishops in 1987 discussed the theme: "Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World: Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council". In India a National Convention of Catholic laity was held at Bombay from June 2-5, 1989, and it was followed up in various regions and dioceses by planning different programmes for the awakening of the laity and their theological education. In India Catholic laity have started their own theological journals, both conservative and progressive, and they do play a critical role<sup>6</sup>. But comparatively the laity among the non-Catholic Churches play a more active role in their Churches which are organized in a fully democratic way. In India the lay representatives are the majority in the highest decision-making bodies of the Syrian Orthodox, Mar Thoma, C. S. I., C. N. I. and other Churches.

Today when authoritarian, dogmatic, ritualistic, legalistic and other-worldly religions are becoming irrelevant, the hope for the Churches is in the hands of the laity. If the

Church is to be the salt and leaven of the world and thus to transform it into an authentically human world and to prepare it for the Kingdom of God; it is primarily the laity's task. There is no point in saying that the clergy's task is within the Church and the laity's outside the Church in the midst of the world. This language of "inside" and "outside" has to be rejected. The Church's mission is in the world and it is done by everybody in the Church, both clergy and laity. The specific task of the clergy is to equip the laity to this mission of the Church in the world.

I could foresee the day when the laity will move from the periphery of the Church to its centre, when the magisterium in the Church will exercise its functions in close collaboration with the laity, when the representatives of the laity will sit in Council together with bishops and clergy in equal dignity and honour. The laity will play their inevitable role in all the decision-making bodies of the Churches. The awakening of the laity will have its far-reaching consequences both for the Church and for the world.

### **Women in ministry**

More and more women taking up active and official ministry in the different Churches could be seen as a sign of hope for the future. It is indeed a recent phenomenon, although some of the Protestant denominations like the Salvation Army from the very beginning had maintained perfect equality of men and women in the Church, admitting women to all kinds of ordained ministries, including the highest office in the Church. In fact Catherine Booth was the co-founder of Salvation Army and Evangeline Booth was its fourth "General". But it is only very recently that the main line Protestant Churches began to admit women to the ordained ministry in spite of objection and opposition from various quarters.

At the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Vancouver, Canada, in 1983, the Moderator of the Assembly, the Anglican Archbishop Edward Scott of Canada, who was the main celebrant of the Eucharistic Service, was assisted by two women priests and it was flashed all over the world. In India both the CSI and CNI Churches have ordained



women for priestly ministry. Now the issue among the Protestant Churches is the admission of women to episcopal ministry. The Lutheran Church in Finland has about 300 women priests. But the Finnish Lutheran bishops have decided not to ordain any of them as bishops, although there are no theological reasons not to ordain them. They think that the Church should first get used to having women priests<sup>7</sup>. The Episcopalians (Anglicans) in U.S. have probably the first woman-bishop in the person of Barbara Harris in Massachussetts.

The World Alliance of the Reformed Churches has urged all its member Churches which do not ordain women to reconsider their position in the light of the Scriptural declaration of the oneness of women and men in Jesus Christ<sup>8</sup>. This, indeed, is a challenge to the Catholic Church as well as to the Orthodox and other Eastern Churches who continue the tradition of the last 2000 years of not admitting women to the ordained ministry. Many theologians and biblical exegetes say that this tradition though very long is neither "divinely instituted" nor sacrosanct but simple endorsement of the social and cultural tradition of the time. It was the social custom of a patriarchal society that entered into the scriptural and ecclesial tradition, rather than scriptural tradition controlling social practice. But now when the patriarchal societies are changing giving way to an egalitarian society where men and women enjoy equal rights, opportunities and powers, should not the Churches reconsider their tradition however long it may be? This is the crucial question addressed to the traditional Churches.

Women's contribution to the Churches is the hope of tomorrow. Women form half of the humankind but this much of the potential and resources of humanity is not properly made use of by the Churches. Secondly, women have their own specific talents, aptitudes and virtues, like strong commitment, dedication, enduring patience, generosity, compassionate love etc. These talents and potential must be brought into the ministry of the Churches. Thirdly, a male-dominated Church will have its own imbalances which must be corrected and complemented by the proper participation of women in the affairs of the Churches at all levels. The perspectives of men and women are, indeed, different and their complementarity is required for the wholeness of truth.

## Collegial and synodal structures

With regard to the structures of the Catholic Church' the most important change during our time is the shift from the Papal, Monarchic and pyramidal model to the Collegial and Communion model. According to the doctrine of Collegiality as taught by Vatican II, the bishops are not the executives or delegates of the Pope but the successors of the Apostles and they form a college or permanent body to which is given the highest authority in the Church. It means that the Papal Primacy has to function in a new way, in a collegial way, that the Pope has to function as the head of the episcopal college. The body and head must function together in collaboration with each other.

The Roman Synod of bishops is the new institutional structure which gave concrete expression to the doctrine of collegiality. One could see in this institution the beginning of a new development which will have far-reaching consequences. In the coming decades or century, the Roman Synod might emerge as a very powerful body from a consultative status to a juridical status. The membership of the Synod may be extended to include representatives of the clergy, religious and laity both men and women. The Synod may assume more powers and responsibilities including even the role of electing the Pope.

The emergence of the National or Regional Episcopal Conferences and Synods of Individual/Local Churches is another sign of hope which would promote the identity, individuality and autonomy of the different local/individual Churches and thus make the Catholic Church more and more decentralized. The concept of the Universal Church and the relation between universal and local Churches will be more clarified in the coming decade. Universal Church is a communion or fellowship of the different local/individual Churches, where one local Church will not be under any other local Church. Local Church is the concrete embodiment of the Universal Church, and not a mere part or administrative unity of the Universal Church. The Universal Church is fully present in the local Church. The local Church is the real Church in its original. Local Churches are autonomous in the sense that

they are not dictated by any other Church. Local Churches could be different in their theological and spiritual heritage, in their liturgical practice, in their discipline and organizational structures. The unity among them therefore does not consist in uniformity but in faith and sacramental fellowship. This unity is expressed in their communion with one another, visibly expressed in the communion among the bishops. A local Church becomes catholic and universal not by the mere acceptance of the doctrine of papal primacy or by submitting itself to the Pope, but by its communion with all other local Churches. Of course, in this communion of Churches the Pope will always have a unique role. He will be a humble instrument, servant, symbol and focal point of this universal catholic communion.

### Emerging ecumenical church

In an address during his visit to Rome, Archbishop Robert Runcie, the Primate of the Anglican Church asked this question: "Could not all Christians accept the kind of primacy of the Bishop of Rome exercised within the early Church, a presiding in love for the sake of unity of the Churches in the diversity of their mission"?<sup>9</sup> I hope that a new style of functioning of papacy within the Catholic Church will play a key-role in bringing all the Churches together — Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Anglican. The Catholic model of the communion of different Churches will be gradually extended to include all types of Churches provided they are united in the same faith and the same sacramental fellowship.

One could see a sign of hope in the ecumenical consensus document on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (The Lima Document, 1982) prepared by the Faith and Order Movement and endorsed by the World Council of Churches<sup>10</sup>. The different Churches through their life and work together in the ecumenical movement for more than 50 years are realizing gradually that fundamentally they are united in the same faith today, and in the BEM document they tried to articulate their common faith in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. The document is a common proclamation of the faith of the Churches. The BEM document is part of an ecumenical process of



active, creative and critical "reception" of the faith of the Apostolic Church for our times and there will emerge an ecumenical convergence necessary for the visible unity of the Churches.

### **Liberation of theology and theology of liberation**

The fact that theology is becoming more and more liberated from the hands of the powerful and upper class and speaks in a language and idiom of the poor and oppressed is another fresh sign of hope. There is no absolute and perennial theology valid for all times and all people. All theological language is historically, socially and culturally conditioned and this inevitably calls for theological pluralism. Feuerbach once wrote: "If God were an object of a bird, he would be a winged being"<sup>11</sup>. Our concept of God is anthropological and our particular God-language will be conditioned by our society, culture, history and time. Though God's revelation is meant to be universal and for all times, any theological talk about that revelation is conditioned as revelation is filtered through the human experience and expressed in a particular human language. This means a liberation for theology from its traditional forms, language and articulations.

If all theologies carry the mark of their particular contexts, we have to evaluate the relevance and adequacy of a theology by examining it in its actual context. What should be the language, idiom and concerns of a theology in the context where the vast majority in the society are poor, oppressed and exploited? Has Gospel and theology nothing to do with this inhuman and subhuman condition of the majority of human-kind? Today's Liberation theology, Black theology, Minjung theology and similar theologies believe strongly that Gospel is and has the power for change in society. Gospel is the good news of liberation, indeed, integral liberation. Liberation theology emphasizes that salvation and liberation, though distinct, are closely related. According to Leonardo Boff, "it is Monophysitic to assert that there can be salvation without historical liberations; it is Nestorian to assert that there can be historical liberations without an openness to salvation"<sup>12</sup>. He would say that as humanity and divinity are united into the one person of Jesus

Christ, distinct, but without separation or confusion, so are united salvation and liberation though they are distinct. Salvation intrinsically includes historical liberations. Jesus has preached the arrival of the Kingdom of God, although it is not yet fully realized. Historical liberations which include all aspects—social, economic, political and cultural—are the base for the Kingdom of God, although they will be totally transformed in the final eruption of the Kingdom of God. So any preaching of the Kingdom or salvation which is exclusively other-worldly, without any concern for the historical liberations of humanity, will have no credibility, and will be rejected today.

Theology of liberation in the cultural context of Asia, Africa and South America challenges also the monopoly and domination of western theologies which is one form of neo-colonialism or cultural colonialism. Until recently, theology in Asia, Africa and South America was imported from Europe and America by the missionaries and the tragic consequence is that the indigenous Christians are suffering from a religious or theological schizophrenia. Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Anglican bishop of South Africa writes about the situation of the African Christians as follows: "With part of himself he has been compelled to pay lip-service to Christianity, as understood, expressed and preached by the Whiteman. But with an ever greater part of himself, a part he has been often ashamed to acknowledge openly and which he has struggled to express, he has felt that his Africanness was being violated. The Whiteman's largely cerebral religion was hardly touching the depths of his African soul; he was being redeemed from sins he did not believe he had committed; he was given answers, and often splendid answers, to questions he had never asked"<sup>13</sup>. The task is now taken up by the indigenous theologians from Asia, Africa and South America to theologize in their own cultural context and to give shape to an inculturated Christianity. It is a movement full of hope, though mixed up with dangers and risks.

## Conclusion

We have not tried to make an exhaustive list of the signs of hope in the Churches today. After all, to be able to read the

“signs of the times” is a prophetic charism which varies according to persons and the measure of gifts. Those who have a sense of history and are aware of the movements and forces at work today will be able to read the future in bare outlines, though not with full certainty. But the signs of hope visible today do not guarantee a bright future for the Churches. We have to work out our future and it requires adequate preparations and planning. The future cannot merely be left in the hands of others. All of us have to be responsible members of the Church by becoming vigilant and active. We have to identify the forces and movements that elicit hope and become one with them.

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### Foot Notes

- 1 Hans Kung, *Infallible? An Enquiry* (London: Collins, 1977), p.16.
- 2 Thomas T. K. "How Basic Communities are Changing Latin America", *One World*, No. 97 (July, 1984), p. 17.
- 3 Mt. 18:15-20.
- 4 I Peter 2:9ff; Heb. 13.15; Rom. 12:1.
- 5 Mt. 20:25-28; Mk. 10:45; Lk 22:27; Jn. 13.12ff.
- 6 For example, Journals like *Hosanna*, *Laity* etc.
- 7 *Ecumenical Press Service*, 22-31 October, 1969.
- 8 *Ibid* , 1-5 September, 1989.
- 9 *Ecumenical Press Service*, 89. 10. 22.
- 10 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Faith and Order, paper No. 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982).
- 11 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* p. 17.
- 12 Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 59.
- 13 Quoted in Theo Witvliet, *A Place in the Sun: An Introduction to Liberation Theology in the Third World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 90.



# Grassroot Movements

## Utopia or a Sign of Hope for the 1990's?

Grassroot Movement in India is a new satellite launched into the social space at the meeting point of the sixties and seventies. Since then it continues to revolve round rural masses with increased momentum. The movement is spreading over the length and breadth of the country in such dimensions that its growth is compared to that of a mushroom. It has attracted internal and international attention and recognition.

Internally grassroot movement has come under the purview of the State, the attitude of which is rather dubious. It is with apprehension and mistrust that bureaucrats and politicians and even religious leaders watch the movement. Many of them are scared as they see it as a social force that would ultimately become subversive. At the international level, there seems to be a cautious following of the dynamics of the movement as well as a genuine interest in the same. Among those who for one reason or other keep a close watch on the movement three kinds of appraisal could be observed:

Some look at the grassroot movement as a sign of hope for the Indian masses of the twentyfirst century. For them it is Utopia especially in its direction. By using the capital 'U' they try to understand it as a social project and process with the dynamics of leading the society towards socio-cultural revolution and eventually to a situation of perfection. For them the end product of the movement is a social order where the means of production, distribution and exchange are owned and controlled by the people and everyone is given equal opportunity for the development

and utilization of physical and mental capacities and for participation in the management of social life.

The second line of approach is to consider the grassroots movement as utopia, that is, as zealous and committed but all the same highly idealistic and impractical, going to end up in a blind alley. The third group looking for a *bête noire* hold that it is a movement led by young men and women emotionally, intellectually and ideologically half-baked and motivated by the need of economic security and self promotion.

This triple projection of the movement evokes a fundamental question: Is the grassroots movement a sign of hope, a power to empower people, leading them towards building up a society of justice, love, freedom, of sharing and solidarity? or is it a mere farce, a makebelief, mirage?

An assessment and appraisal of the grassroots movements is required here and this could be done effectively within a framework of study, focussing on the conjunctural context from which the movement emerged, its ideological background, its mode of functioning and finally its relevance in the national context.

### **The Indian context of the early seventies: a point of interrogation for the youth**

The seventies had been a strikingly eventful decade for India because of certain unprecedented socio-political happenings. The early years of the decade witnessed a mass upsurge against the Congress leadership at the Centre with youth as its main component. Jayaprakash Narain, the veteran leader, awakened the consciousness of the people, more particularly of the university students towards the seemingly incurable malaise that was rotting the Indian society at that time. The youth became highly sensitive to the unjust structures, lined themselves up in the Total Revolution launched by J. P., motivated by a combined ideology of Marxism, Leninism and Gandhism.

The participants of the total revolution strongly criticised the Indian democratic system which under the Congress rule had become a funk. The Constitutional declaration of making India a 'Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic

had become defunct, they said. The political leadership that had lost its credibility on account of corruption and anti-democratic practices at the top echelons was severely criticised. In the economic sphere the 'revolutionaries' pointed out how the constitutional pledges and Plan promises had become dead letters. For instance, the constitution stated:

The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political shall inform all the institutions of the national life..."<sup>1</sup> This pledge was lamentably broken.

The Five Year Plans on their part had the objectives of "bringing about a structural transformation of the economy so as to achieve a high and sustained rate of growth, a progressive improvement in the standard of living of the masses, leading to the eradication of poverty and unemployment and provide material base for a self-reliant socialist economy"<sup>2</sup>.

The 'revolutionary' youth found the planning hypocritical to the core as millions of educated, under-educated and uneducated youth both in the rural and urban sectors remained unemployed.

Economic planning in India has until now produced an elitist model of development and a politics in which vast number of impoverished population are treated as 'untouchables'. When they are 'touched' by the so-called development efforts of the State they are usually adversely affected<sup>3</sup>. Planning by 1970 had reached structural limits beyond which they are unable to provide sources of livelihood to the vast majority of the population existing on the periphery of socio-economic and political system. The Indian development model born out of economic planning was primarily oriented to serve the microscopic minority of urban-based industrial, bureaucratic and technocratic sector, ignoring the welfare of the masses in the unorganized and informal sectors both in the rural and urban areas<sup>4</sup>.

In the agricultural sphere, Government policies and programmes such as Green revolution have on the one hand generated capitalist farmers and on the other reduced small peasants to the position of landless labourers, and the already landless workers to a fleeting and floating population, leaving villages

and trying to settle in urban centres. The primary producers — the tribals, the rural artisans, the small and marginal farmers and the landless labourers already living below poverty line — were pushed to the verge of destitution and hunger. “Their survival need cannot become an effective demand in the market for they have practically no purchasing power. They have been exposed to a state of semi-starvation or chronic malnutrition resulting in physical and psychological stunning and slow death. For them the problem is of survival, not of development”<sup>5</sup>.

It is in this context of feudal, colonial and capitalist exploitation, where the ‘the GNP Trickle Down Formula’ of the Planning proved to be futile and where while a negligible minority were enjoying land, wealth, education, social status and privileges, 200 million people were in utter destitution, malnutrition and starvation, that State Emergency was declared. This was the straw that broke the camel’s back. For hundreds of university students who were already exposed to the rural reality through N. S. S. (National Service Scheme) and were impressed and influenced by the total revolution of J. P., State Emergency was an eye opener. Reflection on the social reality of India motivated them towards a committed action for the suffering millions. Eventually they had formed themselves into ‘Action and Struggle Groups’.

### **Action and struggle groups**

These groups generally known as social activists have now become a unique and seemingly permanent phenomenon in the Indian society. These activists, most of them urban based degree-holders with a middle class background, have chosen those people written off by development and organised politics as their target people. They include tribals, landless labourers, small peasants, plantation workers, poor fishermen and the socially discriminated and economically exploited Dalits. As for the ideological and methodological background of these activists, Ajit Roy provides a profile drawn by those who had already made a critical study of the Action Groups<sup>6</sup>:

The action groups enter into the life reality of the poor and the oppressed and have attempted to raise the voice of the voiceless... Action groups are part of the wider movement in search of new forms of social and political action through



which the masses of the people would move from the periphery to the centre of development and political processes... (H. Volken).

Action groups attempt to tilt the balance of power in favour of the marginalised sections of society... empowering the powerless... through people's participation in their own development... as the marginalised taking control over their lives and decision-making... or as a non-party political process... (Walter Fernandes).

(The action groups) were exposed to the broader socio-economic political reality of the country and were quite wary of the superficial politics of all the established parties despite their being under the influence of different ideologies, all of them were dissatisfied with the existing state of affairs and wanted radical change in the situation. Moreover they implicitly believed that to change the socio-economic reality in the real sense, social action had to begin at the microlevel.

Political parties, in particular communist parties, have not been able to organise large sections of the working class, rural poor, women, urban unorganised sectors etc. This political space created by the inadequacy of the party to understand, educate, mobilise and organise large segments of the working class has provided the major opportunity for the action groups to work with this class (Rajesh Tandon & Ganesh Pandey).

To add one more streak to the profile,

(The action groups) have created new political and civil spaces by converting the needs of survival and development of the people into political, economic and cultural rights not only as individuals, but as collectivities... (they created such spaces) not only by intellectual formulation, but through praxis which transforms needs into rights by imparting organisational forms to otherwise spontaneous protests and struggles and above all by questioning the existing model of development and politics<sup>7</sup>.

Thus the poor and oppressed masses have become the target people of the Action Groups, by instilling in them an awareness of their rights, by forming people's organizations and through active participation, the action groups launched grassroot movements.

### **A few landmarks in the grassroot movements<sup>8</sup>**

The action and struggle groups during the past two decades succeeded in organising grassroot level movements in different parts of the country. There are peasant organisations, which have undertaken struggles with the landed power; movement among Dalits though not very encouraging has also succeeded in mobilising the hitherto silent and subservient masses and geared them towards tackling their existential problems of social discrimination, economic exploitation and cultural backwardness.

A few outstanding movements emerging out of the committed efforts of the action groups could be mentioned here. The Shahada Movement in Maharashtra, Chattisgarh Movement in Madhya Pradesh, Shetkari Sanghatna and Kashtakarai Sanghatna again in Maharashtra are instances of people's struggles against the existing feudal relations in these areas.

Ecology-oriented struggles against capitalist invasion into the forest areas of the tribals have also been launched recently. There have also been systematic and virulent fights in coastal areas on the issue of capitalist penetration into the hereditary and traditional area of operation. The Chipko Movement fighting for the preservation of the Himalayan foothills from the capitalist ravages was a forerunner for further similar movements.

The Jharkhand, Mukti Morcha a tribal movement in South Bihar (1978-79) launched a militant struggle against bureaucrats and money lenders and tried to oppose dam-building projects and other efforts to 'exploit' local resources (valuable minerals for all-India use and export, yet mines and factories being controlled by outsiders).

Fishermen's agitation in Kerala (1975) to ban trawling during the monsoon season is another land mark in Peoples' Movement. All these movements sprang from the grassroots, challenging the Indian government's development process.

### **Church and grassroot movements**

Church's involvement in social life is a built-in feature dating back to its very origin. Christ's life and message was for the people, for humankind. Down the centuries Church's com-

mitment to people's welfare took varied ideological formulation and operation forms. From charity work to educational and health services and then to social work projects, the Church has come quite a long way in its commitment to society. In all these, Church's social commitment betrays a corresponding note with the ideological and programmatic changes in the secular world.

The Church's knowledge and awareness of the plight of the hungry millions all over the world particularly in the Third World countries had plunged the Church in a new adventure. Since the sixties Pope John XXIII's encyclicals *Pacem in Terris*, *Mater et Magistra*, Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, Theology of Liberation, the emergence of Basic Christian Communities, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and the Church's preferential Option for the Poor – are all expressions of the new determination of the Church to take a different course as far as social commitment and involvement are concerned.

This new venture of the Church is taken up in our country also. Today the Diocesan Social Service Societies (here-after referred as DSSS) following the Church's new line of thinking have agreed to have a common vision, process and thrust. (Tamil Nadu is taken as a case in point.) The vision the DSSS have is the establishment of the Kingdom of God — a just society which would mean the community of people living together in peace and harmony based on the acceptance of the fundamental Gospel values of brotherhood, equality, human dignity, love and justice<sup>9</sup>. As a process it was to promote integral human development at personal, collective, structural, cultural and ecological levels. Development is total only if it takes place at economic, social, political, cultural and spiritual levels through a continuous process of transformation and change in the people and in the society. As for the thrust, the DSSS have opted for people's education and organisation. These are to be done through awareness building, and by raising critical consciousness to help people effectively become a movement (people getting united to generate collective power and undertake political action which means the active struggle of the oppressed to transform the unjust society).

### **The new thrust, action and achievement**

With this new thrust the DSSS have undertaken the people's education and organisation at village levels to empower the poor to recreate their self-image and regain their human dignity while simultaneously becoming agents of social change and transformation<sup>10</sup>.

There are hundreds of grassroot groups operating in Tamil Nadu with different levels of awareness and authenticity as people's organisation. The total number of men's groups are 789; youth groups of men are 552; women groups are 1,500, thus 2,841 groups in all<sup>11</sup>.

Such grassroot level groups have not come out of thin air; they are not a windfall gain. A number of young men and women have been working tirelessly in remote rural villages giving formation, theoretical inputs, awareness and motivation and thus creating a space for the people to get themselves organised and struggle. As a result the grass-root level groups have so far succeeded in transforming their basic needs into effective, legally rightful demands. Through collective thinking and action they have secured community and individual material assets such as drinking water facilities, street lights, road and transport facilities, fair price shops, small saving schemes, bank loans, pattas for house sites etc. Some groups have succeeded in getting an entry into the Panchayat Board/Union as member or president. Grassroot level actions have also helped in bringing about changes in the dependent mentality of the down-trodden masses and in the fossilized socio-cultural practices. To cite some examples, the Dalit people in rural areas have now gained courage to say 'No' to the age-old degrading jobs and to refuse to go to the high castes to settle their disputes and to reject caste discrimination in private and public spheres<sup>12</sup>.

At this juncture special mention should be made about the organisation of women in Tamil Nadu, under, the aegis of the DSSS.

### **Grassroot level organisation of women**

The sheer size of 1,500 groups of women at the grassroot level in the dioceses of Tamil Nadu itself is a near miracle. To see



the women in the movement, whether they are mere members, or village group leaders or field assistants and coordinators, moving in action is itself an incomparable experience. They represent a Power—a power hitherto harnessed in the reservoir of homes and suddenly unleashed into a mighty flow. Like a bird perched on a tree, suddenly spreads out its wings, fluttering and flying away into the freedom of the wide span of the sky, rural women in the movement also, confident of their group solidarity and collective power, do make a 'take off' into the freedom of enriching experience and rewarding activities. Breaking the traditional fetters which have so long confined them to the limited space of family and work-area, women, thanks to their organisation, make a big leap from the portals of their houses to the gates of Panchayat Union Office, Taluk Office and Collectorate.

Group discussion and collective action have given them the 'power of the word' and they are conscious of this power. Coming out of the dark valley of imposed and prescribed silence and extricating themselves from the grip of claustrophobia, women in the movement make a 'pass over' from deathly silence to lively articulation. "We were voiceless before. We could now stand erect on the platform, hold the mike and address those who had in a way imprisoned us, on the plight and right of women", they say. They have empowered themselves to make inroads into the impregnable fortresses of patriarchal, feudal and other dominating structures which deny women any sense of dignity and self-determination. So far sheer survival was their way of life; now they begin to lead a participatory life in the village development, transcending from a state of powerlessness to that of empowerment.

From personal involvement in women's movement in Tamil Nadu sponsored by the DSSS, we could say that women groups at the grassroot level have become a strong social base which in course of time could become a social force. Women as a force express themselves in their encounter with the officials. They could now challenge irresponsible and indifferent administrative officials and confront impertinent MLAs. They have enough confidence to say 'No' to vote-seekers and to put conditions in exercising their franchise.

Their outlook on life is also broadened. Their power of discernment strikes the observer. They could see which social practices are dead wood and which are ever green. For instance, women groups now dare challenge the age-old practice of widows shedding colourful attire, jewels, tilak and the like and trying to look antique. Potential leaders are emerging with a high sense of commitment, sensitivity to women's plight and readiness to take risk, confront counter forces.

Besides these women groups under the aegis of DSSS, there are quite a few non-denominational action and struggle groups of women, organising rural working women on a larger scale, as an integral part of grassroot people's movement. Such organisations are focussing on common issues arising from class and caste domination and exploitation while not ignoring issues specifically pertaining to women. For instance, issues such as dowry, unequal wages, oppression of widows, infidelity of husbands, male absconders deserting a girl after making her pregnant, sex exploitation of Dalit women are taken up for concerted struggle with landed power and administrative and police authorities. There are instances where women have thronged in thousands in front of police stations demanding justice to girls who are victims of rape and deceit.

However, if an appraisal is made of the movement in terms of the accepted goal of the people's movement, we find that women groups fall short of our expectations. More than eighty percent of them are preoccupied with tapping State aid for the fulfilment of their most urgent basic needs such as water, electricity and transport. The long term goals of establishing a secular, socialist and democratic society seem to be out of their thinking range; even the global issues of women such as dowry, sex exploitation and discrimination do not seem to come under their purview. In other words, they are still at the micro-level consciousness of material needs, without critical consciousness of the macro-level problems and organization.

### **Credibility of the grassroot level groups**

In a society where the division between rich and poor is so abominably scandalous, any small attempt to bridge it deserves appreciation and applause. As such the grassroot level movement merits more than applause. For the first time the most neglected

social groups—such as landless labourers, poor artisans, Dalit people and women—are ‘touched’ and lifted up from the depths of silence.

The worth of this movement can also be weighed in the prevailing global context. In a world, where ruthless violence in the name of socio-political revolution has become the norm of the day, and where millions of innocent lives are sacrificed at the altar of liberty and when constant shelling becomes the symphony of the era, the grassroot movement prods on awakening, mobilizing and organising the socially victimized masses towards social change. In its essence, this movement seems to be the second best to cultural revolution. The tragedy of violence breeding violence could thus be avoided.

The movement has to its credit a strong social base in rural areas. This could be converted into a social force provided the masses are grounded in solid ideological formation which could generate class consciousness and class identity. It is in this respect the grassroot movement looks pale, likely to invite scathing criticism.

### **Loopholes in the movement**

Loopholes detected are varied. It has been asserted that action groups in the Movement have been successful only in a limited way to develop an adequate methodology of working with the people, which leads to the emergence of autonomous, strong and lasting people’s movements. Volken points out<sup>15</sup> that the most striking ‘disease’ which has been affecting the action groups is their vulnerability to break up into splinter groups. It is an anachronism that the action groups themselves committed to the task of building up unity and solidarity among the unorganized rural poor should give in to disunity and disintegration.

It happens also in several cases that even before people get organized or are on the way of giving themselves local and regional structures, the core group of the activists break away on account of internal tensions. This is looked upon as a serious betrayal of the people and of the movement.

It has also been regretted that certain action groups best equipped to enable the rural poor and oppressed reach new

levels of consciousness, achieve organizational strength and gain political weight, only to falter and even leave behind an unfinished task in the long run.

Having pointed out where the activists usually go wrong, Volken tries to find out the reasons.

Is it the middle class life style of the action groups which they find it difficult to throw over board? or is it the strong 'guru' personality of the leader that obstruct team work? Or still, is it the cerebral development, a result of advanced formal education which made it impossible to be attuned to the people of totally different types of intelligence in which heart and head are still in harmony?<sup>14</sup>

Foreign fund seems to be a canker that gradually gnaws at the root of action groups. Money is a tempter, destroyer and disintegrator. Starting with getting money to conduct seminars to give political education to the oppressed, action groups put demands to purchase lands, to build conference halls, to buy vehicles and, finally, end up in starting English medium schools in urban areas for middle and upper middle class children. It also happens that as time passes on, activists become anxious about their future and economic security and prefer to get settled in life.

Active and committed involvement also might lead to the breakup of the movement. People's organisation leading to confrontations with the economic and political power structures certainly lands the action groups in police inquiry, confiscation, arrest and even in prison. Unless equipped with a very high degree of commitment, and risk-taking daring spirit, the action groups would easily lose their morale. And it does happen!

As for the target groups, namely the poor and the oppressed, they have become increasingly conscious of their material needs and have acquired the ability of procuring the necessary assets. One could see them becoming 'economico-passionate'. This trend is more conspicuous among women who exhibit an unlimited zeal for action aimed at the fulfilment of their felt needs, namely, water, light, roads and so on. To get them they are ready to undertake any number of trips, make any number of visits to Government officials. From such a situation it is only a few steps more to get transformed into 'homo consu-



menus' with an unsatiable appetite to have more'. This hunger is liable to breed capitalistic values of money, profit competition, power and so on. In the absence of 'politico-ethical' values among the masses, the society which the action groups are supposed to aspire and strive for, shall remain only a dream and never a reality.

The grassroot level groups and the movement in India today have a 'raison d' être'. While our country and many nations in the world are oscillating between violent struggles, causing blood-shed and human holocausts, 'in order to establish a better social order and while the determined dictatorial fascist measures of the states are trying to maintain the existing unjust social order, grassroot people's movements have struck a unique path to build up a New Society and a New World. As long as this Movement remains faithful to its initial ideology and methodology, it stands out as a sign of Hope for the future.

Madurai.

Mary Pillai

## Foot Notes

- 1 John Desrochers, George Joseph, *India Today*, Centre for Social Action, Bangalore, 1988 p. 13.
- 2 *Ibid*, quoting F Y P VI, 1 and 17. cf 1-10.
- 3 D. L. Seth, Human Rights, New Approaches, New Definitions, *Illustrated Weekly of India*, Jan. 3, 1984, p. 40.
- 4 *Ibid* p. 40.
- 5 *Ibid*, p. 40
- 6 Walter Fernandes (ed.), Social Activists and People's Movements, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi. 1985, p. 130.
- 7 D. L. Seth, Human Rights... IWI, op. cit (3) p. 41.
- 8 Stan Lourdu Samy, 'Peoples Movements in India, in "Peoples Movements in India Today and the Mission of the Church", *Jeevadhara* Vol XV. No. 88, July 1985., p. 267-269.
- 9 P. Ramachandran, Yvon Ambroise, Rudy Lobo, M. Coutinho, Thrust Towards Community Organization, a regional report, TASOSS, Trichy, 1989, p. 39, 40.
- 10 *Ibid*, p. 137
11. *Ibid*, p. 139.
12. *Ibid*, p. 139.
- 13 H. Volken, 'Action Groups: Beginning or End of a Dream, in Social Activists... op. cit (6) p. 14.
- 14 *Ibid*. p. 16.

# The Meeting of Ideologies

## History overtakes revolution?

History has been racing at break-neck speed during the past few years, and it is almost impossible for anyone to stand aside and take stock of the situation, which changes incredibly fast. The decade which is just behind us opened in a sombre mood, owing to the intensification of the cold war, with the nuclear arms race and ideological confrontations threatening to get out of control and the spectre of "Mutual Assured Destruction" (MAD) of the superpowers and, along with it the destruction of all civilization, looming large on the horizon.

But then came the winds of change. It began as a cool breeze blowing from Moscow already in the early years of the decade and became a veritable hurricane since the election of Mikhail Gorbachev as Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (C.P.S.U.) in 1985. Gorbachev's electrifying personality, his highly imaginative and bold approach to problems, including those which had been bedevilling Soviet-U.S. relations for decades, as well as transparently sincere commitment to radically critical evaluation and renewal of the society and system over which he presides (expressed in his two famous catch words, *glasnost* and *perestroika*), almost miraculously transformed the world scene.

Today hardly anyone speaks of another world war as possible. If, for centuries, indeed, millennia, politicians and political scientists used to understand war as the "continuation of politics through other means" (this is known as the Clausewitzian maxim), today there seems to be nearly universal appreciation, if not acceptance, of the principle enunciated at the meeting between Gorbachev (who is now President of the Soviet Union while continuing to be the Secretary General<sup>1</sup>

of the C. P. S. U.) and Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of West Germany, that war cannot any more be considered a tool of politics.

While the entire Communist world is in ferment, Eastern Europe is being metamorphosed. In Poland, the Solidarity movement had threatened to overwhelm the Polish Communist regime in the late 1970s. It was kept suppressed by the military government of General Jaruzelski for nearly a decade, and has now returned to capture power through democratic means and rule the country together with the Communist Party as a junior partner. Hungary never remained the same after the crushing of the nationalist-democratic uprising in 1956 by the Russians. Even the Kadar government, set up by Moscow, largely went its own way to introduce its own kind of perestroika. Today there is no Communist Party in Hungary. The Party liquidated and re-created itself as a social democratic party, constitutionally committed to a multi-party system. Similar changes have come about in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria almost entirely by peaceful popular pressure. The notorious Berlin Wall has been formally breached, and it appears to be only a matter of time that the two German states are united or confederated. As this essay is being written, Roumania is settling down after the bloody overthrow of Nicolae Ceausescu, who, together with his wife and other closest relations, had presided over that country's "proletarian dictatorship" for almost a quarter of a century and (reportedly) amassed a personal wealth of \$ 1000 million in secret accounts in Swiss banks. Ominous rumblings are heard also in the other two Communist states, Yugoslavia and Albania.

That the changes taking place in the Communist world are phenomenal and irreversible seems to be beyond question. It also seems certain that the two socio-economic and political systems, Capitalism and Communism, are at present in close co-operative interaction. A third seemingly certain fact is that in Eastern Europe, religion, specifically Christianity, has been playing a significant role as catalyst of change. Finally, we must recognise the central role being played willy nilly by Gorbachev in this process, as an initiating, catalysing, moderating and orienting force.

In a certain way, the transformation coming about in the Communist world is the necessary result of the dialectical process of history according to Marxist doctrine. As Gorbachev has very frankly admitted in his major publication, *Perestroika*<sup>1</sup>, Soviet economy and society just could not go on without radical transformation on the economic and political levels. This necessity of profound and wide-ranging reforms has also been the basic theme of the thought of Deng Xiaoping, supreme leader of the Chinese Communist Party. However, as has become notoriously evident through the bloody suppression of the agitations for democracy in June last year, the Chinese Communist leadership appears still determined to restrict reforms to the economic level.

It is true, on the other hand, that reforms in China considerably preceded those in the Soviet Union and on the economic front the Chinese reforms have been much more radical than the Soviet ones. However, as regards the transformations happening in the Communist world, it is Gorbachev who occupies centre stage for very good reasons<sup>2</sup>.

### **Gorbachev and His Perestroika**

Mikhail Gorbachev is a man of clear, long-range and wide vision and of profound humanism. He is intensely aware of and honestly articulate about the deep economic and moral malaise affecting the Soviet Union; he is also deeply concerned about the problems affecting humanity in general, which he knows to be intricately inter-related in spite of vast differences and even contradictions. Hence the man's capacity not only to initiate and take the responsibility for revolutionary changes, but also to see that the changes proceed with moderation and control.

As Gorbachev sees it, the world situation today is such — in terms of scientific and technological progress with its ambiguities and ambivalences, the threat of a nuclear holocaust, the looming ecological crisis, the growing poverty and debt crisis in third-world countries, among other factors — that dialogue and co-operation between Capitalism and Communism are both inevitable and imperative. And here, Gorbachev does significantly depart from the world conception of classical Marxism.



According to the latter, it is the inviolable law of history that the opposition between the oppressors and the oppressed, at the present time, between the capitalists and the proletariat (the chief protagonists of the conflicting classes) must progressively intensify so that, in the final result (proceeding from a most violent conflict), capitalism will collapse and give way to socialism. This will come about in two stages: the first, transitional stage of the *dictatorship of the proletariat* and the second, final and permanent stage of the truly communist or classless and stateless society. In this view, even though the proletarians and the Party of the proletarians (which is the Marxist Communist Party) definitely favour peace between nations, considering that even wars *must* serve the cause of class struggle and world revolution finally resulting in lasting universal peace, class struggle must receive priority even at the risk of war.

Gorbachev's view on revolution and war is totally different. According to him, given generally, the profound ambivalence of contemporary science and technology (which threatens to destroy civilization and even life by its own dynamics), but, especially, given the already huge nuclear arsenals with the capacity to destroy the world many times over, it is imperative to rethink the entire dynamics of class struggle and world revolution, giving the highest priority to peace between nations for the sake of human survival.

Secondly, for Gorbachev, democracy and democratization is "the essence of perestroika, the essence of socialism"<sup>3</sup>. These terms, democracy and democratization, call for some explanation.

In his writings, Lenin has distinguished "real" democracy, which is, of course, communist or socialist democracy, from merely "formal" or bourgeois democracy. In the latter, which prevails in the so-called democratic states, there are "equality, fraternity and liberty" among the citizens, as per the constitution or the letter of the law. In effect and reality, however, the intrinsic and structural constraints of the bourgeois society render the vast majority incapable of enjoying their constitutionally guaranteed rights because they do not have the wherewithal or economic capacity to appropriate them. Bourgeois economic structures or relations of production

cause ever greater concentration of wealth in ever fewer hands rendering more and more people poorer and poorer, indeed, progressively deprived of such basic necessities as food, clothing, shelter, literacy and health care. It is thus that democracy becomes, in bourgeois societies, the privilege of the bourgeoisie or ruling class.

Socialism, at the stage of the post-revolution dictatorship of the proletariat, frankly replaces the term democracy (which is so loaded and identified with the bourgeoisie) with *dictatorship*. The proletarian rule is dictatorship since there is ruthless exercise of political power against the bourgeois elements which remain even after the revolution; but it is also real democracy in that political power is now effectively in the hands of proletarians constituting the vast majority of the entire population. The primary economic object of the proletarian dictatorship is to effectively guarantee the fulfilment of their basic material needs of all the people. It is for this purpose that certain rights, relating to freedom of political association and expression, called fundamental in bourgeois constitutions but, as pointed out above, practically remaining the privilege of the few, are reluctantly abbreviated. Lenin did not claim that the "real" socialist democracy under the proletarian dictatorship would be fully real or perfect democracy. This, like true freedom, will come about only in the final stage of the truly communist and classless society<sup>4</sup>.

What Gorbachev is concerned about is what he calls the distortions of Leninism which happened in the post-Leninist Soviet Union. In spite of much very real success in terms of fast and massive industrialization, general welfare as well as the defence of the Union and socialism against very heavy odds, such terrible distortions as personality cult, arbitrary and totalitarian tyranny and state terrorism destroyed the spirit of the revolution and socialism during the Stalinist era. Though the worst aspects of Stalinism were put an end to during the Krushchevian interlude, the Breshnevian era which followed was marked by bureaucratic corruption at all levels, economic stagnation and all sorts of social evils. The only possible remedy to this situation was a totally frank exposition and critique of the system (*glasnost*) and its radical restructuring (*perestroika*) with the mobilization and effective empowering of the entire population at all levels of the state.

Gorbachev insists that the democracy and democratization that he understands as the essence of perestroika and socialism is *socialist*, not bourgeois.

*Socialist democracy* means, first of all the recognition of man's central role "both from the point of view that everything is done for man and from the point of view that people themselves must do everything that we have conceived collectively"<sup>5</sup>. Socialist democracy means, secondly, that "We must live proceeding from the socialist principle: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.' There is a high degree of social protection in our country. This is what distinguishes socialism. We have free education, free medical services, the right to work, the guarantee of a job, generally available housing..."<sup>6</sup> Further, "We are extending socialist democratism into all spheres, including the economy. Nowhere in the West do they elect directors and foremen, nowhere in the West do work collectives endorse plans. And this is what constitutes our socialist democracy."<sup>7</sup>

Socialist democracy does not mean, however, any relaxation of the basic socialist principle of the social ownership of the means of production by the reintroduction of private property and production for private profit. Neither does it mean multi-party democracy: "We hold to Lenin's concept of a political party. According to Lenin, it is a party of a new type performing the role of society's political vanguard...Today we have come to realise with ever greater clarity that no transformations are possible without a political vanguard capable of rallying the best forces of the country ideologically and organizationally, of comprehending the process taking place in society and applying the results of this scientific analysis"<sup>8</sup>. However, to ensure that the party truly and effectively remains the political vanguard of the country, everyone must be held accountable and answerable. "We have just put an end to the state of affairs where certain persons in our Party, certain areas have been beyond control, beyond criticism for years. And we shall not return to this state of things now."<sup>9</sup> In all this, the guiding principle is provided by Lenin's idea: "The proletariat prepares itself for socialism through demo-

crazy and after the revolution can govern society only through a broadening of democracy''<sup>10</sup>.

In practical terms, Gorbachev has not only exposed the malaise of the Soviet society and system but also introduced wide-ranging reforms both on the economic front — such as self-management, self-financing and cost-accounting in industry, lease-holding and lease-based relation in the farming sector — as well as on the political front — freedom of the press, free elections (where the electorate was given the freedom to put up and elect their own deputies in favour of the official Party candidates), separation of the government from the Party, free and frank discussions in the Party plenum and parliament open to viewers on the T. V. screen. Such internal reforms are in addition to the almost miraculous transformation of the relationship of the Soviet Union with the United States and West European countries, especially West Germany. Gorbachev has also seen to it that the Soviet Union looks with equanimity as one Warsaw Pact country after another has rejected the Communist system.

### **Changes elsewhere in the Communist world**

As mentioned in the beginning, history is racing and being created at break-neck speed in the Communist world. We have neither the space nor adequate data, let alone expertise, to examine the revolutionary changes in detail or depth. At any rate, we ought to have some general idea about them in order to place the entire process in some sort of perspective.

In China, reforms preceded those in the Soviet Union almost by a decade, starting immediately after the death of Chairman Mao and the return to power of Deng Xiaoping. Chinese reforms started with their own glasnost (that is, critique of Maoism and, especially, its phenomenal excesses during the Cultural Revolution) and perestroika. There is however a fundamental difference between the Chinese and Soviet reforms, in that the latter seek to keep a balance between economic and political restructuring, while the former stubbornly try to confine themselves to the economic front. On this front, the Chinese have gone much further than the Russians in introducing what are traditionally considered capitalist elements, like private



ownership of farms, factories and business, production for profit and amassing of wealth, besides wide-ranging foreign collaboration (with trans-national companies), foreign travel and education for those who can afford. On the political front, on the other hand, authoritarianism of the Maoist tradition continued almost untouched. It was this imbalance and incompatibility between economic liberalism and political authoritarianism (which necessarily spawned corruption even at the highest levels) which gave rise to the student agitations which spread fast to workers and peasants, threatened to rock the regime for almost a month starting in early May last year and was crushed by brutal military action in early June.

Countries in Eastern Europe present quite a different picture. Communism in these countries was much less native than that in the Soviet Union or China, being practically imposed on them in the context of their exhaustion and collapse during the Second World War, which meant, for most of them, Nazi invasion and occupation, at first, and then "liberation" by the Red Army, which came to stay in these countries as unwanted guardians and custodians. The Russians imposed Communist regimes using national Communist or Workers' Parties as tools, and ensured their survival, not by the acceptance by the peoples concerned, but by the presence of the Russian troops within or just across the borders and/or by the repressive power of the state machinery controlled by the Communist parties in the government.

Yugoslavia successfully challenged Stalin and left the Warsaw Pact in 1948. While introducing some measure of economic reforms, such as worker participation in management and self-management of factories, politically, Tito's regime was as authoritarian as Communist regimes elsewhere. Romania also successfully challenged Russian hegemony in 1950 and, without leaving the Warsaw Pact, practically went its way, with dictator Nicolae Ceausescu tracing his own course of Marxist "orthodoxy" and turning the country into a family estate, as has been revealed after his fall to a stunned world.

Geographical and historical factors made Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany more vulnerable to Soviet intervention than other countries in Eastern Europe. Hungary

and Poland sought to challenge both Soviet hegemony and their communist regimes in the 1950s, though unsuccessfully. In Czechoslovakia, the ruling Communist Party itself wanted to introduce radical reforms and create a "Communism with a human face" during the late 1960s. This bold initiative was brought to naught by the rolling in of the Soviet tanks in the autumn of 1968. However, even though such yearnings and initiatives for change were repressed through brute force, nothing remained the same any more. In Hungary the very regime set up by the Soviets after the crushed rebellion of 1956 began introducing such economic reforms as to make that country the most capitalist among the Warsaw Pact countries in the ensuing years. In Poland, too, where the post-uprising Communist regime had introduced some measure of economic and political liberalism, the people felt confident enough to challenge the regime, demanding freedom and democracy in the late 1970 under the banner of the Solidarity labour union, which almost in no time became a people's movement. The government engaged Solidarity for some time in apparently constructive dialogue, but then suddenly suppressed it and placed the country under military rule. The suppressed Solidarity gathered sufficient power in the underground and, with Gorbachev's Moscow following a course of non-interference, was able to oblige the military regime to allow free elections and face the humiliation of nearly total rejection by the people. Poland is now ruled by Solidarity in co-operation with the Communist party as a junior partner. In Hungary the ruling Communist party chose to vote itself to official liquidation and recreate itself as a social-democratic party committed to liberal multi-party democracy. In East Germany (economically the most advanced of the Warsaw-Pact countries), popular pressure not only brought about radical changes in the Party and state structures, opening the way to liberal democracy, but also succeeded in literally breaching the notorious Berlin Wall. Similar far-reaching changes are clearly under way in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. As was mentioned, the Romanian Communist regime of Ceausescu has just crumbled as these lines are being written, and there seems to be hardly anything to stop the democratic process from flowering in the remaining two Communist citadels of Yugoslavia and Albania. In this whole East European process,

Gorbachev seems to let each country follow its own course without external interference — in this, following in a very practical manner Lenin's famous principle of "the right of nations to self-determination".

### **A manner of understanding the changes in the Communist world**

It will be hardly an exaggeration to say that barrels of ink have flowed and are flowing through the quills of scribes, commenting on, trying to make sense out of, evaluating, and trying to find the direction and end of the happenings in the Communist world. No one has, to my knowledge, claimed to possess the clairvoyance to be able to make any sort of definitive judgement. Even so, there have not been wanting those who proclaim the demise of Communism and the triumph of Capitalism, without even a conflict. On the other side are those, like Gorbachev himself, who claim that Communism is right now in the process of a vigorous self-renewal.

It must be noted that it is not only anti-Communists and non-Communists who see the triumph of Capitalism in the traumatic happenings in the Communist world. Cuba's Castro — whether Castro is a true-blooded Communist of the Marxist breed or only a nationalist dictator who found it convenient to call himself a Marxist and Communist is a question we need not discuss here<sup>11</sup> — and Maoists all over the world (including the Naxalites in this country) are as vehement as the triumphant anti-Communists in proclaiming the triumph of Capitalism in the Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe.

Certainly I do not feel competent to take sides on this issue. I only want to draw attention to certain aspects of the extremely complex drama being played before us, aspects which do not seem to receive the attention due to them.

The elements identified as decisively Capitalist in the changing Communism are material incentive to workers, re-introduction of private property and production with private profit motive, as well as democracy in the normal sense — whether the "socialist" democracy of the Russian type or the more or less liberal ("bourgeois") type being introduced in Eastern Europe.

I think it may be stated without fear of sharp contradiction that Communism of the classical type, implying more or less total state ownership of the means of production and the unchallenged rule (or dictatorship) of the Communist Party, has already become part of history. But I doubt that this can be considered as either the demise of Communism as such or the triumph of Capitalism.

It is a matter of undisputed fact — so much so that it is now taken for granted — that present-day Capitalism, whether in the United States or Britain (which are considered the citadels of Capitalism) — is *not* the classical *laissez faire* Capitalism of the Adam-Smithian type, whose nemesis Marxist Communism understood itself to be. If Capitalism has changed and changed almost beyond recognition over the past century and a half, this was also certainly and significantly *in part* owing to the interaction with and influence of Communism in various ways and in various levels.

Secondly, according to its own self-understanding, Communism is not the absolute but *dialectical* (that is to say, relational, if antithetical) opposite of Capitalism. In terms of this self-understanding, there must necessarily be constant interaction, not only negative but also positive and mutually beneficial, between the two systems.

We may also note that Gorbachev is at pains to stress that *perestroika* is “the continuation of the revolution”<sup>12</sup> strictly according to the mind of and tradition established by Lenin. It was Lenin who introduced, after the “war-time Communism” of the initial years, what he called the New Economic Policy (N. E. P.), which provided for private economic initiative, limited private ownership, production for profit and foreign collaboration, in order to meet the new challenges posed by the revolution. It was Lenin, too, who insisted on the necessity of providing economic incentive to workers when he explained the distinction between the two stages of Communism, the first one being the “socialist” stage, during which the principle governing work and remuneration has to be “from each according to his ability, to each according to his work”. Only at the second and final stage, when, as a result of the new harmony established between the forces of production and relations of produc-



tion, goods and services are available in superabundance and the new socialist humanity has become a reality, will the truly Communist principle rule: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need". It was, again, Lenin who wanted political power to be effectively exercised by the people, and not by Party and State bureaucracy, when he enunciated and insisted on the principle, "All power to the Soviets". Finally, Gorbachev's policy of strict non-interference in the internal affairs of the Eastern European countries, undergoing traumatic internal upheavals, involving the collapse of their Communist regimes, as also his extremely delicate handling of the ethnic problems within the Soviet Union itself, appears to have clear sanction in the Leninist affirmation of the "right of nations to self-determination".

Marxism is well known to interpret all history as the conflict between two mutually opposed social classes—master and slave, feudal lord and serf, bourgeoisie and proletariat. The factor taken for granted or subsumed under either of the conflicting classes is what might be called the *common man* or *the people*. Marxist analysis does see this third factor between the chief protagonists of the conflict. Only it just distributes them between the two, refusing to recognise it as an independent third factor.

This procedure has rendered Marxist theory absurd and Marxist praxis dangerous. According to the Marxist theory, capitalism spawns its own nemesis in the ever growing masses of progressively impoverished and oppressed workers, so that as capitalism advances, proletarian revolution must inevitably follow and overtake it. Actual history, however, proceeded in defiance of this theory. In advanced capitalist countries, workers, instead of being made progressively impoverished and revolutionary, were turned into allies of capitalists. Lenin did not fail to identify and bitterly denounce this bizarre situation when he condemned the "labour aristocracy" of Western Europe and America, who let themselves be bribed, fattened and corrupted by the bourgeoisie at the expense of the nations of Asia and Africa, systematically exploited by Western colonial and imperialist rule. However, neither Lenin nor any Marxist theoretician in my acquaintance did ever truly

identify and come to grips with the multiple fundamental issues this outrageous situation really posed to Marxism.

First of all and obviously, proletarian revolution does not necessarily follow and overtake advancing capitalism as Marxist "law" of history would have it. Secondly, if the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries could be bribed, fattened and corrupted by the bourgeoisie, there seems to be no reason why this process cannot repeat itself elsewhere and everywhere; it would mean that the proletariat cannot be characterized and counted upon as the agents of revolution and the creators of the future classless society. Thirdly, given the possibility of mutually profitable adjustment and alliance between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat at the expense of others, revolution can mean new and more advanced forms of exploitation and oppression for the masses of people. Fourthly, the bourgeoisie-proletarian adjustment and alliance can mean, on a large scale and in a large perspective, joint exploitation and oppression of the masses of humanity.

### **Political communism and communism as humanism**

It appears to me that Communism has, in the course of history, done itself great injustice and damage by forgetting that, fundamentally and above all, it is humanism in terms of its basic drive and ultimate goal: the elemental protest against the enslavement and dehumanization of men and women and the ethico-practical elan and project for their ultimate liberation and total humanization. In the course of history, Marxist orthodoxy has been only too keen to emphasize almost exclusively, indeed with fundamentalistic fervour, the "scientific" character of Communism, and to ignore, even at times to deny flatly, that Communism is humanism at all. Those who swear by the scientific character of Communism have of course recognized the powerfully humanistic character of the writings of the young Marx, especially the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*<sup>13</sup>. But they claim that Marx overcame the humanist stage (which they attribute to the lingering influence of Hegelian idealism) when he developed his revolutionary science.

As I said, Marxist orthodoxy has dismissed such humanistic interpretation of Communism as tainted with idealistic

speculation, at best only preparatory to the later development of revolutionary materialism. I am not interested in joining issue with Marxists on this score. What I want to point out is that, according to the strictest Marxist orthodoxy, the proletarian revolution and the ensuing dictatorship of the proletariat are "still political in nature" and only transitional towards the ultimate goal of the "new society" in which all class distinctions and class struggles will have ended, in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all". In other words, beyond political and scientific Communism, as its self-transcending goal, is Communism as Humanism or universal human emancipation — which is nothing other than what Marx has described as genuine Communism in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*.

I have no reason to interpret the present trauma of political and scientific Communism and its positive and cooperative interaction with present-day Capitalism as the failure of Communism and the triumph of Capitalism. I see it rather as part of the process of transformation and transcendence of scientific Communism towards its own humanist and universalist goal, which is also, in a true sense, the goal of the bourgeois revolution from which was born Capitalism as its distortion.

It is true, as has been often pointed out, the truly classless and stateless society which Marxism sees as its final goal is an ideal or Utopia when judged in terms of science and technology in the broadest sense. That does not mean, however, that it can be simply dismissed as purely illusory and absurd. Men and women have always sought to ground their being and to find ultimate meaning in what is undefinable and unattainable purely in terms of science and technology. Such Utopia has, moreover, been the stuff of religion, including, particularly, Christianity. The object of Christian faith is the Kingdom of God, in which God will have "made all things new" for humanity and will "wipe away every tear from their eyes", when "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more".

What I want to stress, in conclusion, is that it will be well for all, especially religious people and, more so, Christians

not to be hasty, let alone overjoyed, to announce the demise of Communism as such in the present woes of political Communism. Communism is the ultimate Hope, the ideal and goal of history, which has taken all sorts of defective shapes in political and social movement in ideologies, in religions. These will and ought to give way, however painful the process may be, for the Hope to become Reality in its own time and in its own way.

J. Kottukapally

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### Foot Notes

- 1 Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika - New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. London: Collins, 1987.
- 2 Time magazine has named Gorbachev "the man of the decade" because he has been "the force behind the most momentous events of the Eighties".
- 3 M. Gorbachev, "Democratization - the Essence of Perestroika, the Essence of Socialism". Address at the meeting of the C.P.S.U. Central Committee with the heads of the mass media, ideological institutions and artistic unions, January 8, 1988. Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1988.
- 4 For a critique of the Marxist-Leninist view of history, see J. Kottukapally, *The Hope We Share. A New Christian Approach to Marxism*, Barrackpore, Dialogue Series, 1983, Chapters 6 & 8.
- 5 Gorbachev's speech cites under 3, p. 4.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.      7. *Ibid.*, p. 14.      8. *Ibid.*, p. 10
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 11 J. Kottukapally, *Liberation Theology and Marxism*. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1985, p. 6.
- 12 Gorbachev, "Democratization ..", p. 4.
- 13 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, pp. 96-7.



# **On the Threshold of the 1990's**

## **Emerging Trends and Socio-Cultural Processes at the Turn of the Century**

The last stage of the journey of the human family in this century has been marked by many momentous events and new turns. The ominous prospect of a nuclear holocaust which, not long ago, seemed to hang over the human family as Damocles' sword now seems to have vanished as a bad dream, while fresh signs of hope are emerging both at the global and local level.

Among the significant developments are the changes in the relationship between the First and the Second World and victory of peoples' movements in many parts of the world against forces of domination and oppression. The political and military confrontation that characterized the post-war period between the First and the Second World and determined the global politics has now undergone a sea change. As for peoples' movements, they suffered heavily at the hands of vested interests. The repression of these movements (which has not, however, abated and therefore no room for naive and premature optimism) made many sceptic about their capability to bring about any effective change in the prevailing order of things. Such apprehensions are today laid to rest as the future of peoples' movements has brightened up with events like the Edsa revolution in the Philippines and the uprising of the people of Eastern Europe against self-serving rulers, party-chiefs and bureaucrats. The most dramatic of all was the dethronement and execution of Ceausescu and his wife Elena.

We who have witnessed such significant developments at the end of the 80's cannot but pose certain questions concerning the future. What is the shape of things to come? In

which direction the human family would be moving in the next few decades? Is the domination and oppression of the poor and the weak going to intensify or relent? Are we heading towards more conflicts and confrontations or towards an age of justice, peace and harmony? What signs of hope are there? These are, evidently, very difficult questions to answer. Some indications could be found about the future direction if we examine some of the trends and socio-cultural processes that are beginning to emerge.

In this brief article I propose to present a few emerging socio-political processes at the global as well as at the local level. These reflections are made from a Third World perspective with special focus on Asia and India. A study of the emerging trends at the turn of the century is indispensable for any theology that wants to be contextual. It is crucial for the Churches in the Third World, in Asia and India, for their self-understanding, insertion and relevant praxis in the new century that is about to dawn.

### **1. Conflict between the macro and the micro**

One of the things which we observe all over the world today is the conflict between the macro and the micro — the big trying to domineer the small and the latter refusing to be dominated and reduced. This can be seen in almost all areas of societal life.

At the political level for example, we have the macro in the form of nation-state, a political entity of the modern world, which was brought into existence by setting aside the factualities at the micro level, consisting of diverse ethnic, linguistic, regional groups and peoples. In most cases, the overarching structure of nation or state does not acknowledge the experiences and self-perceptions of the various groups and peoples subsumed, nor respect their legitimate autonomy and differing identities. Resistance, therefore, to the macro political reality on the part of the micro is something quite pervasive. In Asia we have such a situation, for example, in Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines etc.

What is happening at the political level is but a modern reproduction of the contrast between the 'great tradition' of

the dominant groups, classes and religious agents and the 'little tradition' of the marginalized groups in society. The macro often declares its respect for the micro. But history and experience show that the macro, in reality, develops its own world, its own interests, and in this process seeks to absorb the micro.

At the level of culture we note a dangerous trend to transform the whole world into a mono-cultural zone. The politically and economically powerful First World tries to import subtly into the rest of the world a culture, or rather a sub-cultural way of life, based on standardized forms of production, same patterns of marketing and consumption of goods. It passes for macro culture, and indeed *the* culture. The struggle against this cultural imperialism is visible in the societies of the Third World.

If we take the field of sciences — social, anthropological etc. — the same trend is discernible. Grand social and anthropological theories are construed in relation to which the situations and experiences at the micro level are but cases. To these experiences the grand theories are applied for verification and confirmation. This approach and orientation is today being challenged. Many concrete experiences at the micro level simply break the pre-conceived schemes and theories. The reality at this level presents such differences and variations that they defy to be classified into a general frame; they call for totally new explanations and interpretations.

The conflict between the macro and the micro is also evident in the field of natural sciences and technology. One of the principal reasons for the gross disparity in growth in the world is the dissociation of science and technology from the social and economic base of the people at the bottom. Grippled by a megalomaniac vision, science and technology proceed with giant strides to accomplish the political and economic designs of the powerful.

It is this mega or macro science which is unfortunately imported into the Third World, into Asia and India. Therefore, there is a cleavage between the type of society, its needs at the micro level and the grand designs of imported science and technology. While the gap may continue with serious con-

sequences for the poor and the marginalized, at the same time there will develop a strong trend towards taming the macro and mega science. The demand for a science and technology with social concern and a human face will get strengthened further in the years to come. This trend will share the objectives of the ecological movement which is putting pressure on the macro science to develop itself in accordance with the environmental concerns. The conflict between the macro and the micro is likely to continue at the turn of the century and even beyond, leading finally to a clear choice in favour of the latter in science and technology.

At the religious level, the second part of the twentieth century has brought fresh awareness about the great religious traditions of humanity, in spite of, perhaps because of, the powerful trend towards secularization. These religions are in fact macro institutions, systems or great traditions. But at the turn of the century we are witnessing the trend of not letting oneself be impressed by the macro religiosity identified with huge institutions, power, wealth etc. There is a search for salvation in the small, in the neglected and despised. It is a trend in which the mustard seed assumes importance, a trend in which what happens to people at the micro level in terms of religious experience becomes more significant and crucial than the mighty religious institutions, its interests and concerns.

This orientation reflects the attitude of Jesus in his time. He was not impressed by the grandiose temple to which the disciples drew his attention (Mk 13:1; Mt 24:1). On his part, he pointed rather to an insignificant widow in the same temple, highlighting the worth of her small mite (Mk 12:41-44; Lk 21:1-4). The place popular religiousness is acquiring indicates the future direction<sup>1</sup>. So too, the small, micro, basic communities are clear expressions of the religious orientation and praxis of the years to come. The multiplication of sects in the past, which is likely to continue, represents a protest against the macro religious institutions and traditions which are becoming sterile and a spent-up force. The turn of the century may witness in the religious field, as in others, an intensification of the conflict between the macro and the micro religiousness.



## 2. From fragmentation to integration

In today's world we note, on the one hand, forces of division operative in various areas of societal life. In spite of many fragmentations characterizing today's world, we also note, on the other hand, signs of hope. The human family is moving today towards a unity which was, perhaps, never before achieved in history. There is a deep aspiration to get out of situations of division and to reach integration. If fragmentation is self-destruction of humanity, the movement towards unity is the sign of its redemption.

Nobody can deny that in spite of many hurdles, international cooperation is getting stronger today. There are many initiatives at the international level to take up jointly issues affecting humanity like apartheid and violation of human rights. Besides, we have bodies of regional cooperation as for example SAARC and ASEAN in Asia.

The effectiveness of the movement towards the unity of the human family, however, will depend in practice on the development of the relationship between the three blocks into which our world has been divided in the past decades. There have come about significant and dramatic turns in the relationship between the First and the Second World. The concrete shape and form of this new inter-relationship is yet to be seen. If ideology was the bone of contention marking the relationship or rather lack of relationship between the one and the other, it is economic difference and imbalance that continue to divide the First World from the Third World. The prospect, therefore, of the meeting between the First and the Third, between North and South, will be real to the extent that the economic, and consequently the political, question is faced.

We could, in the coming decades, envisage two parallel processes. On the one hand, the rich and capitalistic nations, for which finding new markets is very crucial for their progress, will try to be generous towards the poor nations in offering credits so that these latter could buy their products—machineries, arms etc. Even countries relatively safe from debts will be trapped into a serious debt-crisis. On the other hand, the already existing solidarity among the Third World nations

on the political level will begin to express itself more and more also in the economic front. It may initially take the form of trade relationships among the Third World nations of particular regions. The general movement of unity of the human family may have to pass through these stages of conflicts and tensions on the one hand and phases of partial co-operation and solidarity on the other.

At a more basic level, the trend to view the whole reality in a holistic and integral perspective, despite the still dominant tendency of atomizing and dichotomizing, is slowly gaining momentum. This orientation is supported by modern empirical sciences like physics, biology, psychology etc. The modern science has passed from the mechanistic paradigm of Newton to a new paradigm of quantum physics where the whole universe is seen as inter-connected within one and the same movement and dynamism<sup>2</sup>. In the face of the unity of the entire reality, sciences like sociology, anthropology, psychology too are becoming more and more aware of their limitations in so far as each one of them deal only with a fragment of reality which cannot be explained without its linking up with the other dimensions. Hence we note how inter-disciplinary approaches are becoming today common and even indispensable. The myth that reality can be known by atomizing it is giving way to a holistic and integral approach that can unfold the web of relations connecting all parts of reality.

Part of this overall orientation towards unity and integration are the following two important movements of today: The ecological movement and the feminist movement<sup>3</sup>. They are powerful affirmations of unity and at the same time a protest against fragmentation. The ecological movement challenges the one-sided emphasis of the relationship of man to nature in terms of domination and control; it underscores the necessity of harmony between the human and nature. The feminist movement, on its part, calls for the complementarity of woman and man, protesting against a male-dominated society — a society marked by aggression, violence and war. The concerns voiced by these two movements will set the agenda for the century that is to dawn. They will help to bring about a much-needed balance in the growth of the human family.

The coming decades will be characterized by ever greater recognition of pluralism in all areas of life. Centralization of every kind - political, economic, religious - will be forced to loosen their grips. Decentralization of power, wealth, ideology etc. will begin to happen keeping alive, in spite of many signs of divisions and conflicts, the dream of the unity of humanity in diversity. Pluralism is going to be the strongest antidote against all domination, control and regimentation. Its language is dialogue and its attitude and praxis is participation. For pluralism is based on the recognition of the otherness of the other. The liberation of the oppressed and the quality of the human life will depend very much on the measure pluralism will be practised in the decades ahead.

### 3. The process of modernization

The process of modernization is a global question which affects every society. Whether East or West, North or South, in every society we find at work, in varying degrees, elements of tradition along with forces of modernization. But in the Third World societies the impact of modernization is much more evident than elsewhere. Science, technology, industrialization, modern means of communication, urbanization, modern educational and political systems and so on, have profoundly influenced traditional cultures, institutions, ways of life etc. And even more deeply, they have brought about transformation in attitudes, values and consciousness of individuals and groups. These changes and transformations are immediately visible in the cities of Asia which are growing at an alarmingly fast pace through mass-mobilization and urbanization consequent on modernization.

I do not want to enter here into the various theories regarding how the process of modernization is to be interpreted, as it may take us too far afield from the mainline of reflection<sup>4</sup>. Let me, however, make three observations which, to me are important for understanding this process. First, modernization is not to be equated with *westernization* which is the process by which a non-Western individual or group adopts forms of life, ways of thinking, values, behavioural patterns etc. of the West. Second, the expression 'modernization' is value-laden. It presupposes that the characteristics of the developed world also

should be one day the traits of the underdeveloped societies of today. (And that is perhaps why there is the temptation to identify modernization with westernization.) Third, the development and modernization which have taken place in the West are not, as often assumed, independent of the underdevelopment of the Third World<sup>6</sup>. Modernization cannot be understood without colonial and neo-colonial history of exploitation.

From a theoretical perspective, it is important in the coming years to pose the question of the relationship of modernity and tradition differently than has been done in the past few decades, specially in the 1960's. Most of the theories advanced in this period rested on two premises. It was assumed that there was a dichotomy between tradition and modernity. No distinction was made between tradition and tradition<sup>7</sup>. Tradition as such was viewed as a force restraining the process of modernization. One did not realize that there are some traditions which can block the process of modernization and others which can be a valuable resource for it.

Another assumption is associated with the so-called 'theory of convergence of industrialized societies' according to which the traditional societies of different kinds become more and more similar as they become industrialized and urbanized. This is a somewhat simplistic approach. It does not reflect the complexity of the social change in traditional societies with certain underlying core-perceptions reflected in the way people of a particular culture perceive, approach and handle differently the same issues and problems<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, the responses to modernization will be different in different societies. A variety of responses in the same society is also possible. Evidently, core-perceptions do change, but its pace and mode of change is different from the structural and institutional changes which may result from modernization.

In practice, however, the meeting of traditional societies with modernity has produced a wide variety of situations. Modernization has produced dual systems in economic, political and cultural spheres. In Asian societies, for example, we find tradition juxtaposed to modernity. Asians, accustomed as they are to live with contradictions, live with one foot in modernity and another in tradition. Another response has been to try



to discard the traditional culture lock, stock and barrel, and replace it with modernity. Yet in other cases, we have staunch opposition to modernity and its values coupled with the defence of traditional cultures, institutions, ways of life etc. In some other situations we have a transference of traditional attitudes and values to modern systems, tools etc., or reversely, superimposition of the modern on the tradition<sup>9</sup>. As far as Asia is concerned it is undeniable, that the mainline response has been a profound desire to reap the benefits of modernity without losing the identity of one's traditional culture and its long cherished values, ideals and core-perceptions. This is a challenging task facing Asian societies and India at the turn of the century.

How should we go about this task? Modernization is an ambiguous process. If it contains, on the one hand, great potential for humanization, it contains elements of dehumanization as well. An economic development in the direction of limitless growth with political exercise of power attuned to it has caused wealth for some at the cost of the poverty and misery of the masses. Therefore ethical and humanistic perspectives from the Asian and Indian resources need to be brought into the modern process of development. This challenging task would also call for a prophetic critique of all forms of alienations and negations, caused by the process of modernization. The following reflections on the centrality of culture will indicate further the line and response to modernization in future.

#### 4. Progressive centrality of culture

One of the consequences of the process of modernization is the relegation of the cultural dimension of life to the background. Economy has been the all-embracing and dominant factor in human and social life. We can observe this in the model of development set forth by the First World for the Third World countries. In the so-called development decades of 1950's and 60's the progress of the Asian countries as well as other underdeveloped parts of the world was thought of and planned in terms of economic growth. But slowly the realization dawned that the goal of development of the poor was far from being achieved, because the economic question was tied up with the political question<sup>10</sup>. 1970's and early 80's tried to come to terms

with the political question — the question of power. Today, with poverty and misery still weighing heavily on the poor of our villages and slums of our cities, the attention is being progressively turned to culture. Today one begins to realize the key-role of culture both for the economic development and acquisition of political power by the people, and more basically for their self-hood as peoples, as active subjects and agents of history.

The culture of a people expresses its spirit, its collective unconscious. Like the trees of the forest which preserve the soil from erosion, cultural roots of a people give them strength and self-hood to withstand the oppression and exploitation of the powerful. It is the living embodiment of its experiences transmitted from generation to generation. It is the uniquely specific way of a people's knowing, feeling and perceiving the reality and interacting with it. That an ancient culture cannot simply be got rid off, is exemplified by the short-lived cultural Revolution in China. Culture does change, but cannot forcibly be cast off.

Even for economic development in the years to come one will have to take into serious account the culture of the people from which stem values, motivations and attitudes. For example, Japan may present exteriorly the same traits of other industrially advanced countries of the West. And yet, Japanese capitalism has a cultural matrix different from that of the West. The thesis of Max Weber concerning the relationship of capitalism and Protestantism is well-known. The Japanese capitalist growth is based on the traditional cultural institution of *furusato* — old home village where people were collectively engaged in rice cultivation with close bonds of relationships with one another and with nature<sup>11</sup>. The Chinese enterpreneurship and business traits derive much from the Confucian philosophy and ethic.

The centrality of culture comes to manifest itself differently in the West and in the East. In the West it has begun to express itself as quest for meaning and search for new symbols. It expresses itself also as virulent critique of the empirical rationality characterizing the present model of development, which is in many respects anti-human and devoid of humanizing culture. In Asia and in the rest of the developing

world, which were dominated by colonial powers, centrality of culture can be seen in the affirmation of identity of a people as a group, nation and in the search for cultural roots to undergird the present-day economic, social and political life. The cultural comes to the fore in our Asian societies also in the aspiration of the people to determine for themselves, on the basis of their history, tradition and values, their own patterns of development and forms of self-government. People would not any more allow the political and the economic to supplant their culture. They are becoming increasingly aware that the political system and the economic growth must bear the imprint of their culture.

During this century in the context of the political independence of the Third World nations from colonial rule, it was thought that political unity will automatically bring about unity among the various ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups. This has been belied by experience of ethnic conflicts, unrest, civil war etc. within the various nation-states. Subsequently it was opined that the creation of a common economic system will unify peoples of different races and countries. This too is today being contradicted by experience. It is enough to think of the European unity primarily founded on economy and a common market. This centrality of economy is today being eroded with the prospect of the re-unification of both Germanies, which has caused serious concern among the French and the British. We note how once again the ethnic and the cultural element or the 'primordial sentiments' are coming to the fore breaking open economic frames. The conflicts between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis, the demands of Lithuanians etc. are indications of the primacy which the cultural element and identity is going to occupy in the years to come.

These trends also show how unrealistic and false is the assumption of the First World that it has resolved the ethnic question through a common economic system, and that of the Second World that it has resolved the same problem through a common ideology. The re-emergence of the ethnic dimension in the First and Second World should lead to the realization of the limitations of the economic and ideological dimensions in human life. The First and Second World which thought that

the ethnic conflicts and cultural conflicts are simply a Third World question, could now learn from their own experience the complex situation that the Third World societies are facing and the difficulties of finding solutions in terms of mere economy and ideology.

## 5. Crisis of survival

The teeming millions of Asia and India are today caught in a deep crisis of survival. The natural resources like land, sea, forests which were for them life-supporting have been grabbed from their hands and these resources are today being controlled by internal and external oppressive forces. The capital and resources of intensive industrialization taking place in our societies have marginalized the masses for whom life has become unbearable in rural areas. Impoverished and dispossessed they flee in large numbers to cities and towns to eke out their existence around slums and shanties in abject poverty and misery. They are deprived of the necessary power—economic and political—to decide their own destinies. The dependent capitalistic policies adopted by many Asian Governments have been suppressive of the rights of workers, peasants and the marginalized sections of society as are the tribals, women, dalits, oppressed youth. The gross imbalance in relation to production, distribution and consumption has created a contradiction between affluence of a few and the abject poverty of the dispossessed masses.

The line of economic development followed in the past few decades has heavily favoured the cities to the detriment of the villages where the bulk of the Third World people live. As a result of global economic politics and other national factors, this trend is likely to intensify in the years to come, aggravating the crisis of survival for the marginalized and powerless groups. A refocusing on the village is imperative to overcome this crisis.

Another development which we can envisage in the years ahead is the escalation of violence and terrorism. It will be the result of economic conditions rather than of political motives. If the colonialism of the first half of the century and the economic policies of development in the second half concurred to strengthen the already powerful and push even further to



the margin the weak and the powerless, this contradictory process will reach in the years to come a breaking point. Recourse to violence and robbery in order to force the powerful and the rich to part with their wealth will increasingly become common. The escalation of unrest, revolts and violence on economic grounds can be expected among the oppressed groups of people, specially the tribals, dalits and poor peasants. Such a development will force structural and institutional changes — a goal that has not been achieved by the present pattern of development.

The roots for the future change can be found in the upsurge of consciousness about the present situation and the conviction that this situation is not to be taken by the marginalized as their inevitable fate but as something to be overcome through their struggles. From the general ocean of misery, voices of protest are being raised against the situation. There is a persistent demand from various quarters to transform the present oppressive order of things into a harmonious one in which people can grow, flourish and blossom as human persons. It is a struggle first and foremost to obtain the basic necessities of life. Equally important is the struggle for equality on the part of large sections of socially outcast and marginalized people like the dalits, tribals and other ethnic minorities.

What concrete shape will these struggles take? The experience of the past decades show that the crisis of survival cannot be overcome by pinning one's hope on one single approach. No single ideology, no single political system or economic arrangement can claim to be the panacea for the woes affecting the oppressed. A plurality of approaches is called for, depending on each specific situation of oppression with its unique characteristics, historical and cultural roots. In some cases, sharp class-based confrontations will lead to the overcoming of long standing oppression, whereas in other cases religions may furnish the rallying point for the people in their struggle against unjust economic and political situations. Still in other cases, a fresh awareness of the ethnic and cultural identity, selfhood will prove as the most effective means for establishing justice and equality.

What role will the ideologies play in relation to the people's struggle? All ideologies promise to get the poor and the marginalized out of their crisis of survival. But it is being realized more and more that the type of ideology necessary for socio-political transformation cannot be dictated from above but has to be shaped and formed from out of the struggles of the people in specific situations and contexts. People cannot simply surrender to any ideology that promises to liberate them. For ideology can be turned by vested interests, party chiefs and bureaucrats into a myth, into a totem which the people have only to prostrate and adore.

What has happened in quick succession in the countries of Eastern Europe amply illustrate the consequence of any ideology converted into an idol. On the other hand, it will be wrong to interpret the developments in Eastern Europe as a victory for capitalism. Any jubilation over communist world tearing apart would be a hypocrisy on the part of the worshippers of capitalism which has little to glory. Capitalism too has undergone and is still undergoing even more serious crisis, even though it may not be so evident and dramatic as what has come about in Eastern Europe. Capitalism has a deceptive charm. It can conceal so well its festering wounds and cancerous growths. Concentration of wealth into the hands of a few with consequent impoverishment of many, racism, new forms of poverty in the so-called developed countries, production and sales of armaments – these are the handiwork of industrial capitalism which cannot claim to help overcome the crisis of survival in which humanity is enveloped. Rather it is the cause for the global crisis of survival.

It may not be easy for the Third World societies to get out of the stranglehold of advanced industrial capitalism and its tentacles spread all over. But the direction of future development is becoming clearer to us. If the great part of the twentieth century has been under the sign of the two mega ideologies, the emphasis in future is going to shift from ideologies again to the people as the centre. Codified and institutionalized responses in the form of ideologies are inadequate to meet the challenges of poverty and survival. We can expect the emergence of fresh and creative responses on the part of the people to the question of poverty, misery

and human survival. However, the ideal of humanization and a non-exploitative and egalitarian society envisaged by socialism is something that no people can renounce, even though the concrete historical form and shape this ideal will take will differ from society to society, and from culture to culture.

### Conclusion

In our reflections on the emerging trends and processes, little was said about religion and theology because religions and their theologies cannot have a separate or parallel agenda for the future. Any religious tradition which understands itself in the service of growth and blooming of the human family has to enter into this process of history, into this socio-cultural movement. It is through immersion into this stream which moves towards a new century with many ambiguities, contradictions, and unresolved tensions, but also with signs of hope, that theology will be able to respond to the human problem in terms of relevant praxis and reflection. The turn of this century offers opportunities to the religions and their agents for a lot of rethinking about their traditional positions and praxis. The trends which have been delineated here are a challenge and an invitation to religions and theologies for dialogue and participation. Basically it is dialogue and participation with emerging trends and socio-cultural processes that will concretely define the role of religion and theology in the years ahead.

Tiruchirapalli

Felix Wilfred

### Foot Notes

- 1 Cfr My paper, *Popular Religiosity and Asian Contextual Theologizing*, presented at a symposium held at the University of Nijmegen, Holland, 3-7 January, 1990 (to be published shortly).
- 2 In his writings Bede Griffiths has repeatedly drawn attention to this point: Cfr, for example, his article: Nature, Technology and the New Society, in *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XVIII (1988) pp 23-31.
- 3 Two issues of *Jeevadhara* on human problem were dedicated to these two questions: January 1987 and January 1988.
- 4 Cfr on this point James Davison Hunter, Stephen C. Ainlay (eds), *Making sense of Modern Times*, Peter L. Berger and the Vision of Interpretative Sociology, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London-New York, 1986, pp. 57-75.
- 5 M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1972, pp. 46 ff.
- 6 Anthony Giddens, *Sociology. A Brief but Critical Introduction*, Macmillan Education Ltd., London 1983, pp. 136 ff.
- 7 S.N. Eisenstadt., "Modernization and Dynamics of Civilization in *Solidarity* No 102/103 (1985), pp. 3-11.
8. *Ibid.*
- 9 M.N. Srinivas, *Op cit.*; Cfr also Yogendra Singh, *Social Stratification and Change in India*, Manohar, Delhi 1989, pp. 91 ff.
- 10 Brendan Lovett, *Life Before Death. Inculturating Hope*, Claretian Publication, Quezon City 1986,
- 11 Masao Takenaka, *God is Rice, Asian Culture and Christian Faith*, WCC, Geneva 1986, p. 22,

# From Religions to Religiosity

*An interview with Prof. Rajni Kothari, eminent social scientist and now Member of the Planning Commission, by Pooranam Demel*

*Pooranam Demel:* Mr Kothari, could you kindly give a critique of the decade India has just now passed through?

*Rajni Kothari:* We have been through a decade of considerable decline in norms and values, erosion of institutions and also a very large spurt of communal violence provoking criminalisation and, for the first time, corruption in very high places. I often say that the decade that we passed through, 1980-89, had as its centre-point the year 1984, the exact centre of the decade. You will remember that George Orwell wrote a book called "1984" which was about the nightmare of the world and its future. I think we passed through that nightmare in 1984.

There was the attack on the Golden Temple and then a whole spurt of communal virus all over the country, encouraged by the ruling party itself. There was also the attempt to dislodge and undermine the elected government in Kashmir, the first government of Mr Farooq Abdulla, by Mrs Gandhi and the manipulation of the whole state structure, the price for which we are paying now with almost total alienation of the valley of Kashmir. Later as a result of that communal virus all over the country, unfortunately, the P.M. herself became a victim of it in the assassination that followed. Subsequently we witnessed the massive massacre of the Sikhs in Delhi, Kanpur and a large number of other places. The atmosphere was charged with communal feelings with an anxiety about the country's future. The deep sense shared by all sections of society was that the future is very grim.

And it was on the wave of that anxiety, through the generation of the motto of the nation being in danger, that Mr. Rajiv Gandhi came to power in such a big way. All these



happened in 1984. Then followed the long Rajiv Gandhi period which has just ended, when communalist manipulation on the one hand and the total reliance on technology on the other dominated. We had a technocratic government, asking for building a strong State at the expense of the poor and the downtrodden, almost forgetting that there existed forty to fifty crores of people living in dire conditions. It was also giving up the whole belief in self-reliance in the country in looking after its own interests and brought in multinational and transnational investors all of which exploded in the arms purchase that we went for, in which lot of kickbacks took place. So the intrusion of foreign agencies were not only in the industrial and agricultural spheres like wastelands and drylands where massive ecological damages have taken place but also in the security arena of the country, from all of which the elite got the best advantage at the expense of the masses. So in fact not only 1984 but almost the whole decade was like the Orwellian nightmare.

A lot has been lost. Fortunately the decade ended on a note of change, a note of hope with the possibility of at least starting a process of correction, rejuvenation and revitalisation of institutions. There is at least the hope that the end of the dynastic rule, the end of the domination of the Congress for almost 40 years – with a little break during the Janata period – will release forces or draw upon forces, generated at the grass-root level, forces of change, forces struggling for a secular identity for the country, for the minorities, forces which would align themselves with those wanting to transform the living conditions of the poor and oppressed. All these hopes are there. Nobody is looking for a miracle but at least some beginnings of the transformation of expectations into a governing structure, a planning structure, a development process may be there, who knows.

It may not be more than a transition but at least some breathing spell is there. So that's at the end of the decade, in respect of how we look at the next decade. On the other hand, because it has been a decade of such massive destruction of values and the upsurge of the three C's that I always talk about, Communalism, Corruption and Criminalisation, I think that it may be extremely difficult to, and certainly not going to be smooth sailing, to transform things, to reverse things.

In short, the coming decade has inherited the past decade, a massive incapacitation of the nation.

I have not spoken of the economic sphere. The present PM had said, "We have a treasury that is empty". I think even this is an understatement because we have gone in for massive debt which will call for anywhere between 35% to 38% debt-servicing. The danger signal is supposed to be between 18% to 20%. Not to speak of the massive internal debt that has generated the enormous deficit financing that will be necessary. There is the balance of payment crisis, which will force us again to a begging bowl before the IMF etc. The communal issue is also something that cannot be easily resolved because towards the end, it incited a very serious communal swing on behalf of, *not by*, the Hindus through the VHP which put forth the fantastic demand that the Ayodhya mosque be demolished and a temple be built in its place in the name of Ram.

In short what has taken place is — this will probably interest you and your readers — that the erosion of values is not only in secular institutions but also in the understanding of religion and religiosity, the understanding of the relationship between man and the Almighty, the relationship between man and nature. It is a deep crisis in respect of the relations between religions in a plural society like India, which has for centuries allowed coexistence of diverse cultures, religious lifestyles and folk-identities. It is unfortunate that attempts are made to impose on such a plural, coexisting, diversity-seeking notions of unity, a homogeneous idea that there is a majority which has greater claim to legitimacy than the minorities and that the minorities must fall in line. Unfortunately there is an emphasis on following more homogeneous religious identities — also in religious traditions like Islam and Western Christianity, not Indian Christianity — seeking for unifying the diversity that this pluralism represents.

I've sometimes called it "Semitisation of Hindusim". Hinduism itself is internally very plural. You knock at the door of the villager in India and ask his identity, he never says he's a Hindu. He will talk of his caste, his village, his kinship structure. The whole notion of a Hindu majority, of the Hindu religion, is in fact an importation. It was a discovery of the European orientalists. Hinduism is often descri-

bed as an onion. You go on peeling it but you never go to its centre. To impose on such a religiosity a view that it should have a centre, unified structure, a single book, or a central church, or clergy would be a gross mistake. All these ideas are so alien to India.

In fact Christianity itself, in India, is very plural. There are so many segments, sects and denominations. It is practised in India in a pluralistic way. The same is the case with Islam in India. It is very different from the Islam of the Middle East. The caste structure, the pluralistic village structure, the diverse identities have made it so. Further, what is interesting is that the pluralism of each of these religions is intermeshed with the pluralism of others. Therefore it was possible for religions to coexist for they were not thought of as centralised religions. They were thought of as extremely pluralistic and decentralised. This was the richness of India.

The notion of 'Hindutva' did not exit then. What was there was, for example, the notion of the Punjabi or Kashmiri. When one talked of the Kashmiris it included the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs and the other communities living in Kashmir. It was a Kashmiri identity. The Kashmiris have always said that the Kashmiri identity is a pre-Islamic identity. Long before Islam came into the scene, there was Kashmir and the Kashmiri identity. Or take this Ram Janma Bhoomi issue and the use of religion to incite religious fanaticism in UP, Bihar, in North India. The reality is that in the recently concluded elections the voters did not vote on communal lines. In fact in a number of places where BJP put up its candidates people have voted for others. Again, it is not that BJP itself, by definition, is a communal party. There are some elements in it, as a result of R. S. S., like VIIP but the reality is that it is as a result of an alliance against Congress, against Rajiv Gandhi that these people of different parties were elected. In the city of Ayodhya itself where they want to construct this Ram temple, it is quite interesting that the voters voted for a CPI candidate and in the Assembly sector itself they voted for a BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) candidate. An informal survey was conducted of Ayodhya dwellers on the Ram Janma Bhoomi—Babri Masjid issue and they said,

“Convert the whole thing into a national museum or leave to the court”. So it is not the masses but some segments of militant people who are at it.

In fact, to my mind, communalism is a secular affair, not religious. It is an exploitation by certain political, certain fanatical groups to gain ascendancy. It is the exploitation by anti-social elements, the mafia elements that converts what are religious symbols into symbols of hatred and animosity. They are not very religious, not pious people at all. In fact I'd say that if there is a genuine conference of religions on the issue which will bring in the best minds of the Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Muslim faiths, there will soon be a solution, I've no doubt about it. But they do not want to do it. They deliberately want to fan this kind of animosity. It is very unfortunate.

This is what has been inherited by the new structure that has come into being in the new decade: Communalism, Corruption and Criminalisation. How to come out of all these? How to go about what the new PM calls as the need to heal the wounds that were created and bring in emotional unity which is the core of the Indian social and civilisational ethos? There is no running away from it but it is not going to be easy.

*P. D.:* Just as you have been saying about the Ram Janma Bhoomi issue, we also see that at various phases in history religions have been a tool in the hands of the powers-that-be. In this scenario how do you see the relationship between religions and the liberation of the last and the least?

*R.K.:* Very very close. I don't belong to the school of thought which says that religion and politics should be divorced from each other. It cannot be. I think Gandhiji had put his finger on the right spot by saying that a truly religious person cannot but be also political for he is concerned about bringing Dharma on this earth. He is concerned with introducing Dharma in the relationships between segments of society. In a society where there is so much oppression, so much poverty, unemployment and misery it becomes clear that without a spiritual orientation it is impossible to realise this Dharma. We know now that forty years of secular development—centralised economic development of the imported models—have not brought about this



but created further chasms between social segments. It has led to a much larger division between the rich and the poor, between the rural and the urban areas, what I call the phenomenon of two Indias, one India that has access to privilege, the State, technology, foreign investments and so on and the other which does not have.

Our fault has been to think of development and the ending of poverty in strictly secular terms, in terms in which the State alone can do it. Its enormous over-emphasis on the State as a stalwart of social problems has been our biggest fault. It has been the biggest fault of the whole century not just in this country but also in the West. On the other hand, there are and have been traditions that have lived on all the way from compassion to liberation, traditions that come from all religions where there is compassion for the poor, for the wretched of the earth. But you don't stop with compassion and compassion does not mean patronising. It means a sense of togetherness, a sense of belonging to each other and hence the notion of liberation, liberation of the individual by identifying with the cosmos or with the larger entities according to different traditions. Some traditions accept a personal God and some have more diffused notions of spirituality.

We are now discovering in the socialist world, how the agency that has brought about a certain sense of liberation from autocratic systems has been the Church. It has played an important role. It is part of the orthodox church, all right. But all the same it has played an important role. And so, I think, we are beginning to realise the mistake in turning away from spirituality, which is also the result of a consumerist culture — and a lot of this in the West. Now a lot of rethinking is going on. There is a whole debate between theologians and scientists on all that is taking place. And finally all these show that religion has to be brought back, not in a dominant position, not in the position of institutional domination by the Church or by Buddhism or any religion, again in a centralised manner but in relation to the masses. Again, not for narrow ends of converting from one religion to another but for the larger ends of compassion and liberation. But I want to re-emphasise that compassion should not be interpreted as something that people up there give to people down below. Compassion should not be thought of as the rich giving to the poor. These are — I think here Gandhiji's notion of trusteeship is important — part elements of feeling one with the other, of feeling a sense of duty and Dharma towards those who are suffering. It is feeling in a very fundamental level a sense of guilt about the inequality that has come about, a guilt that transforms oneself.

As Gandhiji was saying part of the problem of the

Western Marxist systems is that it only thinks of the ruled, the lower classes. But in a way, the worst victims of this historical process are those who have, those who dominate because they have become so pulverised, so remote from reality that they are the worst victims. In some ways they have become irreligious. They have more and more moved towards materialism, more towards concentration of wealth and power. It is they who need to be liberated.

Moreover liberation is not a dichotomous process, as the planners or the State would say, "Let us liberate the poor from poverty", as if it was for us up here in the Planning Commission or the Government or the State to go and liberate them. People have to liberate themselves. This can only happen if we move away from this extremely State-centred notions which necessarily lead to centralisation or extreme church-centredness of the earlier type, where Vatican lords it over the whole world or the Constantinople of the Orthodox church or Mecca, that is, a sort of central place from which religious symbols and lessons are given. No, not that. But it is religion becoming part of the very process of realisation of the self in which everyone is involved.

I think one is talking of religiosity rather than religious systems in the institutionalised sense. What is worse in the present situation is that the State is centralised and religions get centralised. As they get centralised they become enemies of each other. They become competitive. Economic systems become competitive. Everyone wants what the other has rather than think of how we together survive and have a modest living that is shared by all. Today we have heights of affluence on the one hand and misery on the other. And therefore, I'd say that unless one brings basic religious notions of compassion and liberation to bear on secular affairs, it is going to be very difficult for just the State or the Government including the newly elected government in India — which has sworn by humanitarian and democratic norms — to create a society we dream of, where different religions survive side by side with emotional unity as the P M said. We cannot achieve this without a spirituality, the spirituality of the ordinary person, not something that only the learned or those from the pulpit can provide. This can only happen if the religious leaders or those who speak in the name of religion do not engage in false rhetoric, or engage in dogmatism, or separatist ideologies. The problem here is not only with the State but also with the manner in which religion is practised by the leaders of different religions.

*P. D.:* Could you kindly enlarge upon the spirituality you have just now mentioned?

*R. K.:* It is recovering for the self, for the ordinary individual, his inner core from which he has been torn asunder because he has to struggle so much for mere survival. There is no time for him to look into his own self. And yet one knows that the poor, the oppressed, the dalits, the tribals have a very basic insight about their inner core. Spirituality is just restoring this to the ordinary person. It does not mean any big acts; it is simply giving him a faith in his own future through his own striving. This striving cannot take place except by the recovery of his self. I think this is a very fundamental way of looking at religion and the relationship between religion and economic and political facts. Unfortunately much of the religious as well as the secular debate seems to be carried out in a much more structured and institutionalised form rather than in this elemental form of the story of each person, man, woman and child.

*P. D.:* From what you have said I can see that you emphasise a religiosity that would manifest itself in compassion and liberation rather than on religion, in the sense of an institutionalised, centralised religion. Now while most religions have the prophetic tradition of speaking up for the underdog, we also have critics who say that religions keep the status quo, that they co-opt movements from the periphery. Here how would you view the role of religions in evolving this religiosity?

*R. K.:* Well, institutionalised religions have become vested interests. Look at the conflict between the thinking of those who head the institutionalised religions and the liberation theologies. I'm not going into the Marxist or the non-Marxist aspects of it. There is a sense of threat – just like the sense of threat in the running of the State – that these movements from the grass-roots are going to put them off the balance. There is a threat among those who run institutionalised religions that liberation ideologies, either of the secular or the religious variety, will upset their hold on the institution. It's really again, fundamentally a power struggle – a defensive orientation towards religion. It is thinking that if we allow everyone to come in we'll not be able to hold things. It is the same fear of disintegration that you have in the running of the State. Allowing people's power implies decentralisation. If we allow people's organisations to come in a country then there will be more federal structures and then the nation-state may be threatened. Similarly religious leaders of the institutionalised type fear that if they allow this kind of liberations, notions of compassion and liberation, notions of the ordinary people, if they really allow religion to be every man's and every woman's ideology, then their hold, what they have built over the centuries and which has given them so much power over things, they as preachers, they as the bearers of truth, —



which they then *give* to others — all these will disappear. In short you are fighting against vested interests as much in religion as in the political and economic spheres. Therefore the struggle is the same in the socio-economic field and in the religious field. It is of allowing the ordinary person to come into the scene. In both institutionalised State and institutionalised religion this is not allowed.

On the other hand there is the crisis of the institutionalised State and institutionalised religion. They do not any longer enjoy the kind of legitimacy they enjoyed so far. People are no longer blind believers. People are coming into their own. This is the great revolution of our time. There is a tremendous upsurge of awareness, an upsurge of the consciousness of the ordinary people. They want to better their lot but not just in limited economic and social terms but in fundamental terms. I think therefore the institutionalised religions and those who control them have a lesson to learn just like those who control the State institutions. It is to respect the dignity and identity of the ordinary person. It is to realise that there is an inner core in each person; it is to realise that we are not the only bearers of truth, that we the elite do not have the monopoly over truth just because we can read some of the books a little better than the ordinary people or just because we have been taught in a certain way. Not at all. For the ordinary illiterate person is in some way internally more religious than those who control institutions of the religious type. I think that the recognition of what can be called the popular upsurge of identity and liberation is there. But they are not permitted to come into their own *both* by political and social institutions and religious institutions. Therefore the transference from institutionalised religions to generalised religiosity which underlines the oneness of the human race, is very easy to do if only we realise the basic truth — which has been taught by all — that religion belongs to all, that it is inherent in the psyche. Plato would call Soul as the benign part which is the religious part.

In our own thinking in the Indian civilisation what is the goal of life? It is to realise your *atma*. This is not other-worldliness. Other-worldliness does not come from ascribing to particular scriptures but by transcending the limitations of one's own self. I think in a basic way this is the lesson of Christianity too. It is simply that in Christianity, in the decades and centuries that followed, Jesus got institutionalised and it got very close, in some way, to the bearers of power of the State and transformed itself unfortunately into a State. This is what happened to Roman Catholic Church earlier. And therefore it went into this enormous struggle between the State and the Church. Now, fortunately, for a country like India, that is not how religion and politics are associated. We



do not have that kind of a dichotomous view of religion and the State. Fortunately for us even the Indian Constitution recognises the validity and dignity of all religions. It only says that they are all equal. That's our notion of secularism. But in recent decades, particularly this last decade, we have moved away from it because of communalism and because of this the fundamental notion of religiosity has also got hurt. In Hinduism where religiosity was always the issue, there was no organised religion. Now, even in Hinduism, they are trying to impose through VHP etc., an organised religion in the place of this basic religiosity.

My own view is that the Indian contribution to global religious thought can be an extremely fundamental one because — whether it is Christianity, Hinduism or Islam in India — all religions here have grown amidst notions of pluralism and individual liberation. The end is individual liberation. I remember many years ago when the Pope visited Bombay, a group of Christian delegates from Kerala who met him said, 'For God's sake don't impose the Western European notion of Christianity on us. Christianity in Kerala is a totally different one. It is not only that we were the first Christians in India, much earlier than when Europeans became Christians, but also that we view Christianity in a different way. By living with other religions in a pluralistic structure we have evolved a different perspective of Christianity'. I was really impressed when I read it and later when I met some of them in Kerala.

And I think we have moved away from it in each religion and, unfortunately, in Hinduism also, in fact in Hinduism more than any other religion. And therefore you have fundamentalism coming into Hinduism, into Christianity, into Islam. It is a kind of defensiveness, a fear of the other, instead of solidarity with the other. It is also a fear of the people basically, because for the first time, the people are in revolt, not against just the State, but against every organised, institutionalised kind of octopus that has emerged which is not allowing the ordinary person to come into his own. That's why it is more in Roman Catholic countries than in others that liberation theology emerged. It is very interesting that it was where the hold of the institutionalised religion was the strongest that liberation theology emerged. And the same is happening in Islam. The kind of Islamic resurgence, not of the fundamentalist kind, but of the pious kind is emerging again in the Middle East. Similarly wherever Hinduism is semitised, centralised there is a revolt by the ordinary people.

Fortunately there are these signs. All the organised religions should see the writing on the wall because if they do

not, we are not going to see religion but just violence. Violence, between community and community, between religion and religion, the poor and rich, minorities and the majority. Further, this whole idea that there is a majority — a majority religion versus the minority religions — is alien to India. In the Indian religiosity or identity or Indian way of looking at things there never was a concept of majority. In fact it has been said by sociologists that India is a summation of many minorities. Everyone is a minority. Because of the caste system, because of the rural cushions that are there and the great strength of the village economy, there are a series of groups which together constitute the whole nation. There is no majority. But we fell into the trap of Western ideology and its limited notion of democracy which is based on the idea of majority-minority. This is very unfortunate.

For real democracy means freedom. It means self-assertion. It means sharing of things. It is not a majority-minority calculus.

But this then got transfused into the religious realm, and today you talk of a majority religion and a minority religion. It is again the negation of the reality that India is. I think one has to fight against these universal tendencies of institutionalised religions, of majority religions, of homogeneous religions, of the notion that we can control things of everybody behaved in the same way, instead of saying that we can coexist even when different people behaved differently. Therefore I think that it is a very fundamental challenge that lies before the new decade. Whether it is Ram Janma Bhoomi, or Punjab or Kashmir or the Christian church — which is supposed to be alien and there is a lot of people talking like that — the very basic challenge now is that of restoring to the ordinary person his identity, his dignity, his religiosity.

*P.D.:* You had made distinction between Western Eurochristianity and Indian Christianity, between the more centralised Islam and Indian Islam and you've also referred to Hinduism that is slowly getting semitised. In this situation how do you see Christianity could enter into the Indian ethos and help evolve this religiosity?

*R.K.:* We don't have to accept Eurochristianity and its traditions. I do not personally think that Christianity is an imported religion. Christianity came to the Indian shores just about the same time it started in Europe, to some extent even earlier. Christianity is an indigenous religion. There is this whole notion that Hinduism is Indian and all others are outsiders. It's an extremely mischievous notion. It is a notion for some people to hold control. It is like in some of the Islamic States

where Islam is the religion of the State and others have to fall in line. But at the same time Christianity in India draws its inspirations from the centralised conceptions — both of the secular and of the religious type — that have come from Europe. So I think we have to talk about indigenous Christianity and the role that indigenous Christianity will play alongside indigenous Islam and indigenous — if you want to use the word — Hinduism, and other indigenous or traditional religions of India.

I've always been impressed by the role that Christians have played, let's say, in the tribal regions in India. It has again been misunderstood. But I think they've given to the tribals, particularly in the North East, a sense of dignity that they are not just peripheral communities, not just dust in the process of history. This giving of dignity is what matters and it does not matter if the person adopts Christianity or not. That is not the issue. The issue is the role that indigenous Christians have played. In fact even the Europeans who came gradually got indigenised, Indianised in that process. So I'd say that Christianity has a major role to play in respect of theological dialogue with other religions, in respect of relating to the ordinary person and giving him a sense of dignity. For this is a very strong Christian tradition — the idea that each person has a core, has a dignity of his own, the idea that freedom resides in the soul of each person. When this Christian tradition merges with, gets enmeshed with ideas of Dharma in a very fundamental sense that have come from the longer term Indian and Buddhist traditions, I think one is moving towards an understanding of Indian Christianity.

I happened to go to some Christian churches in Kerala and Andhra and listen to the undertones of the worship there though I did not follow the language. It makes me feel that it is so indigenous, so rooted that it relates to the political and economic struggles of the people. But then there are also the persons of the institution who want to control. When the Catholic priests say, 'vote for this party rather than others', they are issuing commands to the community which is antithetical to the very notion of Christianity. I think therefore for each faith, whether it is Christianity or Islam or Hinduism to return to its original message, its original Dharma, in Indian terms, is what lies ahead, more so in the face of the terrible problem that we call communalism.

Communalism is incidentally an Indian idea. Communalism in the West or other parts of the world has a very positive connotation, namely, a sense of community. But here it has become a negative one because it is one community versus others, one religion versus others. I believe that in facing these

problems Christianity has as much a role to play as other religions because it has to be an all-religious search to find an emotional unity in India.

*P. D.:* Mr Kothari, you have in your *Agenda for Future*, explained how you have tried, in the last decade, to combine your struggling with the masses in their movements, whom you consider, "the real forces of change", with the articulation of your reflections. In fact this is the sort of methodology we too try to follow in doing theology. Starting with the experience of the struggling masses and analysing the same, we reflect on it in the light of the Scriptures. This leads to further involvement, with which experience we enter the next cycle of theologising. In this context I'd like to ask you a methodological question. How do you view your new experience of combining action and reflection? Do you think this has given you a cognitive facility you didn't have before? In other words, did it result in what is now called the "epistemological shift"?

*R. K.:* There is basically a two-fold process. On the one hand, the intellectuals normally tend to pontificate and to provide expertise. Now some of us have come to realise that there is much to learn, that we've to relate ourselves to the existing struggles of the masses. In short there is transformation of the self-identity of the intellectuals, intellectuals like me anyway. On the other hand, there is also the realisation that the crisis that we face is at the bottom of the intellectual process. Because it is a crisis of values, of ideologies; and neither the traditional Western, liberal bourgeois ideology is working nor the Marxist ideologies. Even the Gandhian ideology — there is nothing like that but to the extent people are making it an ideology — is not without its limitations. Religious identities or religious ideologies of the sectarian type are also not working. Therefore a very fundamental crisis — what people sometimes call a "paradigmatic crisis" — is in the offing. Therefore the intellectuals have to take on a role of redefining the structure of consciousness, the manner in which the struggles that lie ahead have to be interpreted and advanced, not in an institutionalised, or expertise, clergy, headmaster like way, but by becoming part of the historical struggle for change.

It is, as I said, a two-fold process. One is the intellectual, feeling out, moving out of his ivory tower, reaching out to the masses, not as an expert but as a participant in their struggles. The other is the realisation that the crisis that we face cannot be resolved merely by State actions, actions by theological or sectarian entities but it is fundamentally a crisis in which the intellectuals themselves have to play a role. And



therefore the "Agenda for India", "Lokayan", "PUCL" and lately, the "Independent Initiative", the whole decade that I've spent in, in which one has related, without losing one's own identity, the intellectual debate of the 21st century starting from now, with the real struggle of the masses, seeing them not merely in political terms, not merely in terms of class ideologies but in terms of an intervention by intellectuals in the whole process. For me that's real politics; real politics which also has an element of spirituality. It exists in the intellectuals who are concerned with, who are anguished by what is happening and who intervene in the historical process and become part of it.

*P.D.:* Now there are attempts by some Christian theologians in India to follow the Latin American Liberation Theology model based on the Marxian analysis of society. How do you view this? Keeping in mind the plurireligiosity and the diversities in India would you say that the Marxian framework will have to be more radically desecularised and de-europeanised?

*R.K.:* I think liberation theology in India is not just a question of adopting the Brazilian or the Phillipine model. Liberation theology within Christianity has to relate itself with the liberation theology, if one can use that word, of other religions. Our pluralistic existence is a very different situation from either Brazil, or the Phillipines which are essentially single religious situations. And therefore again we have to indigenise liberation theology. We have to have — if one wants to use the word — our own liberation theology which is pluralistic and respectful of diversities, respectful essentially of individuals, villages and rural communities and which relates itself to the basic Indian religiosity.

So it will have to be something very different from the European, because basically what has happened in Latin America is the rise of a liberation theology in a fundamentally European context because, like it or not, Latin Americans are stuck, both with European Christianity and with European language. They do not have a distinction that Asians and Africans have. In Asia and Africa it will have to take a different form, for both are very plural entities and call for a different sense of religiosity. That is one answer. As far as the Marxist analysis is concerned, I think, again the Marxism of the Marxists who have related themselves to the struggles of the tribals, let's say, is very different from the European Marxism. European Marxists always talked of going from feudalism to capitalism to socialism. For them destruction of the tribes is part of the agenda. I think, the Marxist-Leninists, some of the Naxalites who are working with the tribals, struggling for the life-styles of the tribals, for ecological issues, have a totally different conception and they are, I think, coming up

with a very Indian version of Marxism which is fundamentally based in popular consciousness, which is fundamentally based on the acceptance of diversity. I think they have refined themselves. Whereas the traditional Marxists or the Communist parties or the bearers of the European Marxism are still thinking in archaic terms.

Therefore, whether it is theology, socialism, or Marxism all of them need to face the challenge of an intellectual resurgence and intellectual redefining of their praxis. I think it is happening. It is happening mainly in the framework of the struggles of the ordinary people in a plural setting in a simultaneously political dialectics. Marxism will have to take this into account. This is the biggest challenge to Marxism, that of accepting religiosity as central to the struggle of the masses.

*P. D.:* There are attempts in India, in various religions, to reinterpret their scriptures. We have people like Asgar Ali Engineer trying to give a liberative interpretation of Koran, and Swami Agnivesh, of the Vedas and our own Christian theologians. But there is also the opinion that what India needs today, especially in the context of communalism, is not so much a theology of liberation as a philosophy of liberation that would unite the Indian masses. How would you respond to this?

*R. K.:* I think part of the problem is semantic because theology of religion and philosophy of religion can mean the same thing. Again, a philosophy of liberation for me is not very different from a theology of liberation, so long as that theology is not cornered by one religion. One of the advantages of Asgar Ali's or Swami Agnivesh's or my own thinking is that it is simultaneously political and religious, that it wants to have a modest view of religious organisations and of the State and therefore the people come at the centre of it. Therefore liberation of the people become a simultaneously religious and secular task. Again, I think, that there has been a mistake on the part of many of my own colleagues to dichotomise secularism and religion. By itself secularism will turn to be always totalitarianism. And by itself religion also will turn to be highly orthodox and conservative. We have to join forces in the political arena, by struggling against viruses like communalism, in which secularism and religiousness go hand in hand, creating an ideology of liberation, not just a philosophy nor just a theology. It could be a philosophy-theology-ideology with liberation in the forefront. It does not matter whether it is seen in political terms by some, in economic terms by others or in religious terms by still others. It is the same struggle. I think what we need is a philosophy, a theology, an ideology that relates different dimensions of the struggle into one whole.



*P. D.:* You've mentioned in your *Agenda for Future* that India is a multi-centred society and not of one centre as is thought to be. Could you please elaborate?

*R. K.:* What I have in mind is that India is a multi-centrist, multi-regional society. There is no single centre. It has been a fault to think of Delhi as the centre of India. This notion of a homogeneous nation-state with a single centre is a Western notion. Here is a civilisation that has survived for centuries — the longest survival of any civilisation — without ever having a centre. The single-centre polity of a nation-state is a very recent phenomenon. We never had nation-states. We had a series of states and any number of kingdoms but never a nation-state. And yet what happened? Because of the compulsions of having to live in a world of nation-states we had to create a nation-state. But for this nation-state to work it has to become multi-centric. The commitment of the new government for a more federal and decentralised state will take us closer to that multi-regional, multi-centric polity in course of time.

Therefore what is sometimes thought of as threats from movements of nationality, let's say, in the North East, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal or Jharkand or Uttarkand will not be seen as threats. I think it is a question of moving towards a virtually confederal notion of the Indian State which is accepted as multi-centric but which has the confidence of staying together because it is the only way for India to survive both as a nation and as an entity in itself. We have to accept its multi-centricity and its diversity as the reality that constitutes India. Imposing on it a single-centric idea of the European kind has been a mistake. I think we are realising it now. Many of the regional struggles, caste and communal struggles have arisen because of not realising early enough that we need a multi-centric federal structure.

*P. D.:* Finally, in your *Agenda* you talk of the need for "socialism from below" in India. Now we have the Tiananmen Square massacre, the sweeping changes in Eastern Europe and the implications of these for socialism. There is also the inevitable incorporation into the world capitalistic market. In this situation how do you view the emergence of socialism from below in India?

*R. K.:* That's the biggest crisis actually. The biggest crisis both in the Third World and socialist world is that, because there the different ideologies did not deliver the goods, neither the Marxist ideologies, in terms of the socialist State that came into being, nor the alternative ideologies that the Third World nationalists began to project. Because they didn't work, what we are finding is that both the Third World elites and the socialist

elites are looking to Western capitalism and the multinational forces to take them out of the crisis. The assertion of the people to come out of autocratic regimes is to be welcomed. There is a democratic consciousness that is growing all over the world whether it is Pakistan, the Phillipines, Brazil, Argentina or Eastern Europe or What happened in Tiananmen Square. There is an assertion of the democratic process. But as far as the elites are concerned they somehow confuse democracy with liberalisation, with technological progress. They think that the Western countries are democratic, that they are capitalistic and therefore there is something to be had from them. I think that in the process these countries may achieve "glasnost" but they will not achieve "perestroika" because the socio-economic demands will not be fulfilled by becoming part of the international debt trap. The original Marxists view that this is where once again the struggle of the ordinary people for true democracy, for true democratic socialism will arise. A similar thing will happen in the West because the Western technological phantom has gone in such a direction that you now have 20 million people in America who are shelterless. There is the whole phenomenon of drugs, of the problems of sexuality, the misuse of children in Europe. They are also going to run into this problem.

I think, therefore, all over the world in a way, we'll have to go through a period of being seduced by consumerism and by the capitalist technology. But that is not going to deliver the goods. The reality is that there is not enough to go around. The reality is that the ecological damage that it has caused is so much. But probably we'll have to go through that period because in a way socialism had gone too far in the Statist direction, in the anti-religious, anti-people direction, and people had to revolt against it. But the opposite of it, of equating capitalism with democracy — which is the trap they may be falling into — will lead to enormous increase in disparities. I think therefore, right now, the real struggle of the masses is to fight for both political and economic freedom. We don't really have socialism but only a statist kind of socialism. Hence this seduction towards capitalism. The real struggle of the masses will emerge as the result of democratisation and their finding that democratisation cannot be just political, that it has also to be economic, social and spiritual.

Therefore, as I sometimes say, things will get worse before they get better. But I think it is a simultaneous process. Out of the upsurge of the democratic consciousness will also arise the social consciousness. And that will be a different model of socialism, with a different quality of socialism.